Cook's Country

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2016

Pasta with Sausage Ragu

We wanted all-day flavor without spending all day. After a few weeks of work in the test kitchen, we got it.

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Rum Pumpkin Chiffon Pie
Perfect Holiday Dessert

Sticky Chicken
Sweet-Salty Glaze

Cooking Class: Easy Herb-Roasted Turkey

Rating Nonstick Skillets
5 of 7 Failed Our Tests

Meatloaf Burgers
Hemingway Inspired Us

Smothered Pork Chops
Alabama Version

Skillet Chicken Dinner
with Garlic Mashed Potatoes

Leek and Potato Gratin
Easy, Elegant Holiday Dish

Mozzarella Sticks
Gooey and Crunchy

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Test cook Katie Leaird, above, took inspiration for her Rum Pumpkin Chiffon Pie recipe from this 1929 cookbook published by the Beverly Hills Women's Club. While she was busy in the kitchen, food editor Bryan Roof was scouring eastern North Carolina for another recipe in this issue: fish stew.

Photography: Steve Klise (top left), Andrea Tarwater/Sorrythankyou79 (book jacket); Illustration: Ross MacDonald

"IT'S GOT RUM in it," I said. "For flavor. Just a little bit."

Gram looked at me and blinked. "More than just a little bit, I hope," she said, employing the signature deadpan delivery she's spent nearly 99 years perfecting. "It's supposed to be for a holiday."

We were talking about the Rum Pumpkin Chiffon Pie that test cook Katie Leaird developed for this issue of *Cook's Country*. It's a lighter, fluffier take on the traditional Thanksgiving pumpkin pie, and while to our palates it tastes fresh and contemporary, the pie has rather old roots. Nearly as old as Gram herself (see "Fashions in Food" on page 22).

Our mission in *Cook's Country* magazine is to tell our American culinary story, taking as many twists, turns, and unexpected detours as we can along the way. Sometimes we hit the road to find ideas from hidden corners of the map (see page 7 for our take on North Carolina–style fish stew), and sometimes we hit the books to find ideas from hidden corners of our history.

Happily, both the map and the history books harbor endless inspiration to match our endless curiosity—and our endless appetites.

TUCKER SHAW

Executive Editor

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On the cover: Pasta with Sausage Ragu Keller + Keller, Catrine Kelly
Illustration: Greg Stevenson

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AMERICA'S TEST KITCHEN
RECIPES THAT WORK™

America's Test Kitchen is a real 2,500-square-foot kitchen located just outside Boston. It is the home of more than 60 test cooks, editors, and cookware specialists. Our mission is to test recipes until we understand exactly how and why they work and eventually arrive at the very best version. We also test kitchen equipment and supermarket ingredients in search of products that offer the best value and performance. You can watch us work by tuning in to *America's Test Kitchen* (AmericasTestKitchen.com) and *Cooks Country from America's Test Kitchen* (CooksCountry.com) on public television and listen to us on our weekly radio program on PRX. You can also follow us on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Instagram.

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This retro appetizer is easy to love. We wanted it to be easy to make, too.

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There's nothing wrong with your standard potato gratin. But we wanted something a bit more elegant.

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Pumpkin pie is great. But this year, we were in the mood for something exceptional.
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Ask Cook's Country

BY MORGAN BOLLING

Bundt Pan Chicken

I recently saw a recipe online that called for cooking chicken in a Bundt pan. I'm intrigued. Is there something to it, or is it just a gimmick?
Diane Stapleton, Bloomington, Ind.

We did a little digging and found a load of recipes online for Bundt pan chicken. All call for propping the chicken up vertically by placing its cavity over the center tube of the Bundt pan. (Some call for covering the hole with foil to prevent a mess in the oven). Vegetables, which are scattered around the base of the chicken in the bottom of the pan, soak up the flavorful drippings as the bird cooks.

The benefit of roasting a chicken in a Bundt pan is similar to roasting one suspended over a beer can or a vertical roaster—crispy skin. The vertical position allows the oven heat to circulate more evenly around the body of the chicken than it would in a skillet or roasting pan, where the lips of the pans shield the legs.

But the chickens we cooked in Bundt pans came out funny-looking, with two-toned coloring featuring bronzed breasts and pale legs. Why? Just as the lips of a roasting pan would, the walls of the Bundt pan shielded the bottom half of the bird from the direct heat that causes browning. This also meant that the dark leg meat—which needs to be cooked to a higher temperature than lean breast meat—cooked more slowly, which gave us overcooked breast meat by the time the legs were cooked through.

THE BOTTOM LINE: While it's a fun idea, we decided that the Bundt pan isn't an ideal vessel for cooking chicken because the legs are shielded by the walls of the pan. Chickens roasted this way don't cook evenly. For a primer on how to cook a perfect roast chicken, visit **CooksCountry.com/chickenclass**.

UNEVEN SUNSCREEN APPLICATION?
Nope. The pan's sides prevented even browning.

Getting Skin-Deep

Can I brine a frozen turkey while it thaws to kill two birds with one stone?
John Joiner, La Jolla, Calif.

The easiest way to thaw a frozen turkey is to stick it in the fridge and let it sit, but this takes about 3 days for a 12-pound turkey. In the test kitchen, our quicker method involves submerging the bird in a bucket of cold water for 6 to 8 hours, changing the water every 30 minutes to guard against bacteria.

We were intrigued by your idea for combining brining with this quick-thaw method. So we added salt to the cold water and dropped in a frozen bird. But after changing out the brine a dozen times, we'd run through 3 pounds of salt and grown weary of the process.

We also tried a hybrid method, placing a frozen turkey in a bucket, covering it with brining solution, and placing the bucket in the fridge for 3 days, but this gave us an overbrined exterior and no seasoning within, as the solution couldn't penetrate the frozen flesh. What's more, we had to completely clear out the fridge to make room—not ideal at holiday time.

THE BOTTOM LINE: Unfortunately there's no easy, safe way to combine brining and thawing steps for turkey. For more tips on preparing Thanksgiving turkey and gravy, see "Easy Herb-Roasted Turkey with Gravy" on page 24.

Heirloom Rice

My grocery store recently started carrying both Carolina Gold and Charleston heirloom rice—will they work in your recipes for regular long-grain rice?
Bob Richard, Houston, Texas

Any produce billed as heirloom is simply an older variety that is not associated with large-scale commercial production. The smaller yields often mean that more care is taken in growing, harvesting, and packaging, and you pay more for that. We tasted the two varieties of heirloom rice you spotted, Carolina Gold and Charleston Gold, next to our winning long-grain white rice, Lundberg Organic Long-Grain White Rice. We tried all of these in our recipes for White Rice, Rice Pilaf, and Old-Fashioned Rice Pudding.

In all three applications, both heirloom varieties cooked at similar rates to the long-grain rice. They did, however, have different flavors and textures. Tasters noted that the Carolina Gold rice tasted "nutty" and "sweet," with notes of barley and popcorn; it also had more of an al dente chew than our winning long-grain rice. The Charleston Gold rice had smaller kernels, and some tasters commented that it was more "sticky" in texture, with a "perfumed" flavor similar to that of basmati rice. Our winning white rice tasted "plain" in comparison.

THE BOTTOM LINE: Carolina Gold and Charleston Gold heirloom rices have unique flavors and textures and cook at a similar rate to long-grain white rice. They're both worth trying.

ACORN SQUASH
One medium acorn squash yields 3 cups when peeled and cut into ½-inch cubes.

BUTTERNUT SQUASH
One medium butternut squash yields 7 cups when peeled and cut into ½-inch cubes.

Squash Servings

I never know how much acorn or butternut squash to buy for my family—do you have any guidelines?
Robin Wilson, Poughkeepsie, N.Y.

As we're sure you've seen when shopping for produce, acorn and butternut squash can vary greatly in size. When we're developing recipes that call for acorn or butternut squash, we follow the guideline that one medium acorn squash weighs about 1½ pounds and yields approximately 3 cups of cubed squash—about three servings. For butternut squash, we follow a similar guideline: A medium squash weighs between 2 and 2½ pounds and yields roughly 7 cups—about seven servings—of cubed squash. By the way, if you have trouble getting your knife through the flesh of dense, hard winter squash, use a rubber mallet to tap on the back of the knife to help get it started.

THE BOTTOM LINE: When we call for these squash varieties in our recipes, we adhere to the following guidelines: A medium acorn squash yields about three 1-cup servings, and a medium butternut squash yields about seven 1-cup servings.

Sticking Point

My grocery store sells nonstick aluminum foil. How does it differ from regular foil?
Sarah Jenkins, Franklin, Ohio

Some recipes for baked goods (like brownies) or cheesy casseroles call for greasing the foil you use to cover the baking pan. The shiny side of nonstick aluminum foil is supposed to be nonstick, but it can be difficult to distinguish between the two. This coating supposedly lets the cook skip greasing the foil in recipes that call for it. Nonstick foil is more expensive than regular foil; we paid $8.21 per 75-square-foot roll, as opposed to $5.21 for the same-size roll of regular aluminum foil.

To test it, we made two batches each of a cheesy pasta bake and our Chocolate Cherry Brownies, lining the pans with regular foil greased with vegetable oil spray (as called for in the recipe) for one batch and with nonstick foil for the other. Both foils released easily from the pasta, but the release from the brownies was a different story. The brownies baked on the standard greased foil released more easily and more cleanly; we had to pick small bits of the nonstick foil off the brownies before serving.

THE BOTTOM LINE: We didn't find nonstick foil to be worth the extra cost; it didn't perform as well as regular foil that we greased ourselves.

To ask us a cooking question, visit **CooksCountry.com/ask**. Or write to Ask *Cook's Country*, P.O. Box 470739, Brookline, MA 02447. Just try to stump us!

Kitchen Shortcuts

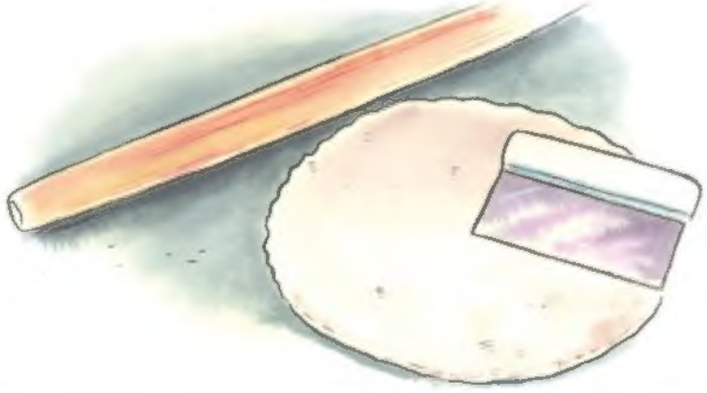
COMPILED BY DIANE UNGER

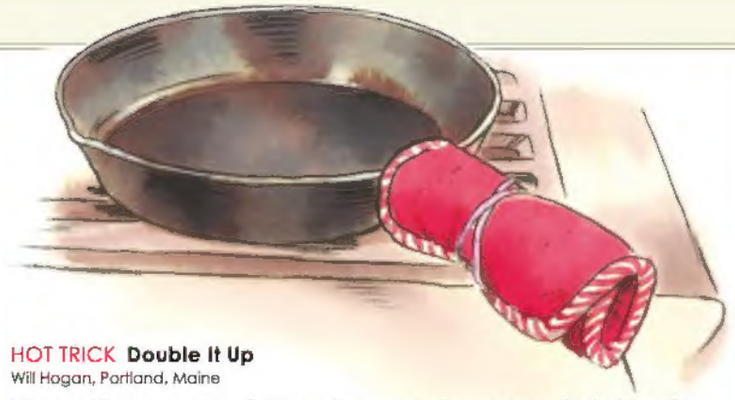
DOUBLE DUTY

Standard Measure

Sandra Wilson, Lancaster, Pa.

A lot of baking recipes call for rolling dough to a certain length. If I don't have a ruler handy in the kitchen (I never seem to), I use my bench scraper as a guide. The blade is exactly 6 inches long, so I can easily measure and then use the bench scraper to help me transfer my dough.





HOT TRICK **Double It Up**

Will Hogan, Portland, Maine

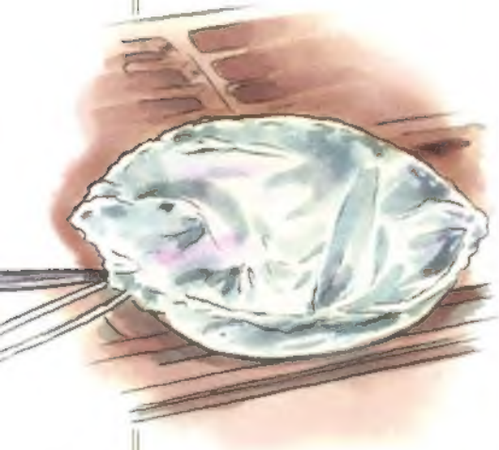
When a skillet is moved straight from the oven to the stovetop, the hot handle can be an accident waiting to happen—a lesson I've learned the hard way. To prevent burns, I slip a potholder over the hot handle, fold it over, and secure it with a rubber band. It's much safer.

GOOD THINKING

Splatter Cover

Melissa Staples, Mikanda, Ill.

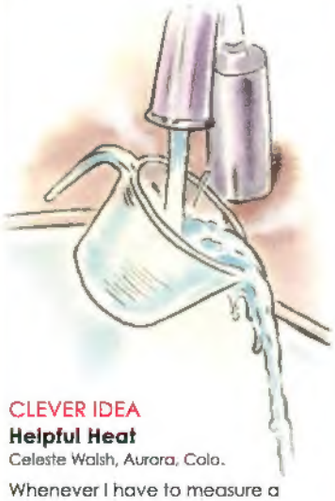
I often need a lid for my skillet, but the only lidded pots I own are smaller saucepans. I've discovered that I can use my splatter guard, wrapped in aluminum foil, as a makeshift lid for skillets of different sizes. It doesn't make the world's tightest seal, but it works well enough.



SMART TIP **E-Z Peel Oranges**

Sarah Muldoon, Oswego, N.Y.

I like to send my kids to school with oranges in their lunches, but they find peeling them messy and frustrating (and a prepeeled orange can dry out). I found a way to prep the oranges that solves the problem: Cut ½ inch off the top and bottom of the fruit. Use a paring knife to score the flesh from top to bottom through the peel and pith about every inch. When you're ready to eat, just pull the peel off each section.



CLEVER IDEA

Helpful Heat

Celeste Walsh, Aurora, Colo.

Whenever I have to measure a sticky ingredient like honey, corn syrup, or molasses, it's hard to get it all off the spoon or out of the measuring cup. To solve this sticky situation, I heat my metal measuring spoon or glass measuring cup under hot tap water, dry it off, and then measure. The sticky stuff comes out easily for accurate measuring.

SMART IDEA

Pineapple Juice Squeeze

Tirzah Peterson, Milwaukee, Wis.

I make several recipes that call for pineapple juice, and I prefer to use fresh—the canned stuff never tastes right to me. I discovered that a handheld citrus juicer works great for juicing pineapple! Just put chunks of ripe pineapple (I get them from my supermarket's salad bar) in the hopper and squeeze them over a measuring cup.

CLEVER THINKING **Instant Measuring**

Cheryl Curry, Springtown, Texas

Ever notice that a baking powder container, with its plastic lid and lip for leveling, is easier to use when measuring than the cardboard box that some brands of baking soda come in? I took this matter into my own hands by repurposing an empty baking powder container for baking soda—the key is to label it clearly so there's no confusion. Now it's much easier to measure baking soda.

Submit a tip online at **CooksCountry.com/kitchenshortcuts** or send a letter to Kitchen Shortcuts, *Cook's Country*, P.O. Box 470739, Brookline, MA 02447. Include your name, address, and phone number. If we publish your tip, you will receive a free one-year subscription to *Cook's Country*. Letters may be edited for clarity and length.

Illustration: Ross MacDonald

Roast Chicken with Garlic Smashed Potatoes

Could we infuse smashed potatoes with savory chicken drippings? Only one way to find out. BY MORGAN BOLLING

ONE OF MY favorite ways to roast chicken is on top of a bed of potatoes. The chicken's skin becomes crackly-crisp while the potatoes slowly steep in the savory juices. And while the test kitchen has mastered this method, we have yet to take it to the next logical place: infusing every bite of potato with comforting chicken flavor by smashing them. I set out to change that.

I started by nestling some cubed potatoes (Yukon Golds, which we love for their buttery flavor) under a 4-pound chicken in a skillet and sending it to the oven. Once the chicken was done, I zeroed in on the potatoes—and found myself disappointed. Those peeking out around the edges of the chicken were deeply browned and bordering on overdone, but the potatoes directly under the chicken were underdone. When I tried to smash them all together, I got nothing but lumps and leather.

I needed a way to even things out and protect the potatoes, allowing them to cook evenly without taking on those dry edges. I decided to create a "lid" for the potatoes by butterflying the chicken—a simpler-than-it-sounds process of removing the backbone and then opening and flattening the chicken. The best tool here is a pair of kitchen shears (also called poultry shears); you just snip from tip to tail along the backbone, flip the chicken, and push down with your palms to flatten it. (See "How to Butterfly a Chicken.")

Cooking the potatoes under the butterflied chicken gave me better results, but there were still some uneven spots. I knew I'd need to add liquid to the potatoes at some point for a successful smash, so why not add it early on and use it to even out the cooking? Rather than cut the spuds into chunks, I sliced them into disks, which stayed fully submerged in the water (1¾ cups was just enough to cover them) and prevented those dark, leathery edges from forming. Bringing the water and potatoes to a boil on the stovetop (which took only 5 minutes) before transferring the skillet to the oven kept things in the fast lane.

> Get our free recipe for Grilled Butterflied Lemon Chicken at **CooksCountry.com/grilledlemonchicken.**

A simple stir-together parsley sauce with capers and lemon gives this satisfying one-pan dinner vibrant flavor.

But in fixing one problem, I found another. The potatoes should have been supple, creamy, and full of chicken flavor when smashed. But instead, they were soupy due to the abundant amount of cooking liquid. Returning the skillet to the stovetop, I cranked up the burner and cooked off much of the excess liquid before smashing them.

Tasters found the spuds a little watery, though, and a bit washed-out. Simply swapping chicken stock for the water added savoriness but maybe too much. So I stuck with water but also turned to dairy for flavor and richness. After trying buttermilk, sour cream, whole milk, half-and-half, and heavy cream, I settled on half-and-half. Just ½ cup, stirred into the potatoes right after smashing, gave them a bit of extra flavor and plenty of luxurious creaminess without weighing things down.

What's better than smashed potatoes? Smashed garlic potatoes. Six cloves tossed in with the potatoes added sweet, not sharp, garlic flavor to the already-deep chicken flavor. Fresh chives perked them up even more.

To seal the deal on this one-pan wonder, I stirred together a simple sauce of chopped parsley, briny capers, and bracing lemon juice to pass at the table for a final note of freshness.

BUTTERFLIED CHICKEN WITH GARLIC SMASHED POTATOES

Serves 4

Take care when cooking the potatoes on the stovetop in step 4, as the skillet handle will be very hot. The parsley sauce can be made up to two days in advance.

CHICKEN AND POTATOES

- **1 (4- to 4½-pound) whole chicken, giblets discarded**
- **1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil**
- **Kosher salt and pepper**
- **2 pounds Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and sliced ¼ inch thick**
- **1¾ cups water**
- **6 garlic cloves, peeled and smashed**
- **½ cup half-and-half**
- **2 tablespoons minced fresh chives**

PARSLEY SAUCE

- **½ cup minced fresh parsley**
- **6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- **2 tablespoons capers, minced**
- **1 small shallot, minced**
- **1½ tablespoons lemon juice**
- **Kosher salt and pepper**

1. FOR THE CHICKEN AND POTATOES: Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Place chicken breast side down on cutting board. Using kitchen shears, cut through bones on either side of backbone; discard backbone. Flip chicken over and press on breastbone to flatten. Tuck wingtips behind back. Pat chicken dry with paper towels. Rub skin side of chicken with oil and sprinkle with 1 teaspoon salt and ½ teaspoon pepper.

2. Combine potatoes, water, garlic, 1¼ teaspoons salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper in 12-inch ovensafe skillet. Place chicken breast side up on top of potato mixture. Bring potato mixture to boil over medium-high heat. Once boiling, transfer skillet to oven and roast until breast registers 160 degrees and thighs register 175 degrees, 50 minutes to 1 hour 5 minutes, rotating skillet halfway through roasting.

3. FOR THE PARSLEY SAUCE: Meanwhile, combine parsley, oil, capers, shallot, and lemon juice in bowl. Season with salt and pepper to taste; set aside.

4. Return skillet to stovetop. Transfer chicken to carving board and let rest for 15 minutes. Bring potato mixture to simmer over medium-high heat (skillet handle will be hot). Cook until potatoes are fully tender and all liquid has evaporated, 8 to 10 minutes.

5. Off heat, use potato masher to coarsely smash potatoes, leaving some chunks intact. Stir in half-and-half and chives. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Carve chicken and serve with potatoes and parsley sauce.

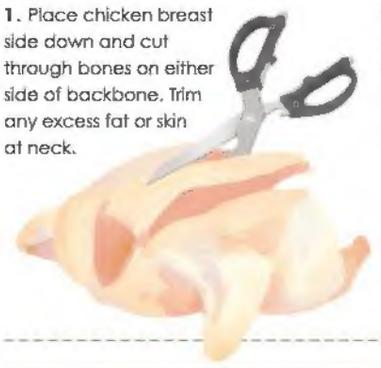
TEST KITCHEN DISCOVERY **A Flattened Chicken Makes a Good Lid**

The chicken cooks on top of the potatoes and water, trapping steam to cook the spuds evenly. When the chicken is done, we remove it from the pan to rest. We then move the skillet to the stovetop, gently driving off excess liquid and leaving the potatoes tender and ready for smashing.

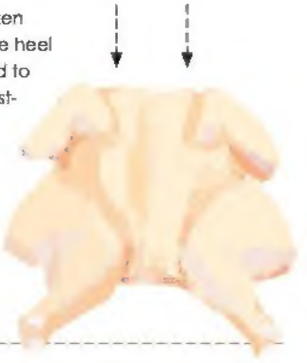
TEST KITCHEN TECHNIQUE **How to Butterfly a Chicken**

A butterflied (or spatchcocked) chicken looks impressive but is simple to create. Kitchen shears make this task easy.

1. Place chicken breast side down and cut through bones on either side of backbone. Trim any excess fat or skin at neck.



2. Flip chicken over and use heel of your hand to flatten breastbone.

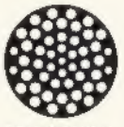


What Makes a Great Potato Masher?

If you don't love your potato masher, maybe it's time for an upgrade. Traditional mashers have long, solid handles attached to either a wavy wire or a perforated disk, but we've seen a number of innovative designs such as a coil shape or spring-loaded handles. Could any of these new products make mashing easier?

We rounded up 15 different mashers priced from $6.99 to $29.99—five wavy, five perforated, and five innovative—and started with an elimination round (mashing 2 pounds of boiled Yukon Golds in a large saucepan). Products that bent or warped, were painful to hold, or took more than 50 passes to mash the potatoes (the best took around 30) were out. This included most of the innovative products with uncomfortable handles and inefficient mashing plates.

INEFFICIENT MASHER



BEST DESIGN

That left us with nine mashers, which we tested with starchy russets, softer sweet potatoes, and more Yukon Golds in 2- and 4-quart saucepans and an 8-quart Dutch oven. We had different testers (men and women, lefties and righties) try each masher on boiled potatoes. We muscled through 150 pounds of potatoes to find that perforated mashers were more efficient. We also liked a mashing footprint that was neither too large (awkward) nor too small (inefficient) and a long handle to keep our hands away from hot steam. Our favorite product was the Zyliss Stainless Steel Potato Masher ($12.99), a traditional perforated masher with a long, curved plastic handle and a circular plate. It was maneuverable, comfortable, and easy to use. Read the full story and see the complete testing chart at **CooksCountry.com/oct16**. –LAUREN SAVOIE

KEY **Good** ★★★ **Fair** ★★ **Poor** ★

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED	CRITERIA	TESTERS' NOTES
ZYLISS Stainless Steel Potato Masher **Model:** E980044U **Price:** $12.99 **Style:** Perforated **Number of Holes:** 50	**Mashing** ★★★ **Comfort** ★★★ **Durability** ★★★ **Compatibility** ★★★	This tall tool has a sturdy mashing plate supported by a long, curved, comfortable handle. The small holes on its mashing plate made an ultrasmooth mash. Its round mashing plate eased effortlessly along the edges of every pan and made quick work of mashing all types of potatoes.
RECOMMENDED		
PREPARA Flip Masher **Model:** PP02-FM100 **Price:** $14.79 **Style:** Innovative, Perforated **Number of Holes:** 73	**Mashing** ★★★ **Comfort** ★★ **Durability** ★★ **Compatibility** ★★★	This innovative masher's convex plate promoted a gentle rocking motion, allowing us to build momentum as we mashed. Its 73 holes produced very smooth potatoes, and its curved plastic handle was comfortable for all except the largest hands to hold. One qualm: While this masher folds flat for storage, the folding mechanism trapped food and triggered once during mashing.
WMF Profi Plus Potato Masher **Model:** 18.7138.6030 **Price:** $19.69 **Style:** Perforated **Number of Holes:** 34	**Mashing** ★★ **Comfort** ★★ **Durability** ★★½ **Compatibility** ★★★	Our past favorite made relatively smooth potatoes and easily navigated around the edges of pans, but a few testers lamented its shorter handle and smaller footprint. Its handle had a slight bend after extensive mashing, but it didn't affect performance.

Illustration: Lauren Pettapiece (top); Jay Layman (bottom)

HOMETOWN RECIPE

North Carolina Fish Stew

Locals have loved this hearty, bacon-infused Sunday stew for decades. Time to take it outside the Tar Heel State. BY MORGAN BOLLING

WHEN CAST-IRON STEW pots come out in Lenoir County, North Carolina, the safe bet is that a fish stew is nigh (see "On The Road").

Here's how it goes down: First, the host renders bacon or salt pork in a large pot. He or she then layers in sliced onions, sliced potatoes, and chunks of whitefish and adds water, tomato, and red pepper flakes—and then walks away for a bit (it's essential to not stir the stew as it cooks to keep the fish from breaking up). When the stew's nearly done, the cook cracks eggs into it to poach until just cooked through. The stew is ladled into bowls and served with sliced white bread to mop up the spicy broth.

Wait. Eggs?

Yes, eggs.

The origins of this egg addition are murky, so I reached out to Vivian Howard, a chef from Kinston, North Carolina. She speculated, "A frugal farmer probably went fishing and wanted to stretch the fish he got." Note to self: Next time I have a disappointing catch, stop by the grocery store for eggs.

To find a starting point for my own fish stew, I cooked five recipes—two authentic versions from born-and-bred Carolinians and three similar-but-different stews from acclaimed chefs like Craig Claiborne. What I found was this: The simplest stews were the best. Adding all sorts of vegetables and other spices distracted from the simple yet comforting and restorative flavor built from bacon, tomato, fish, and heat.

While most local recipes called for adding the uncooked potatoes, onions, and fish all at once to let them cook together, I found it more effective to do things in stages: After rendering the bacon, I cooked the onions and then added the tomato paste and potatoes. Adding the delicate fish last helped protect it and kept it from breaking down too much.

To see more photos from our trip, go to **CooksCountry.com/northcarolina.**

Most Carolinians use bone-in chunks of firm, flavorful, locally caught fish like striped bass, sheepshead, or redfish. I wanted a fish that was widely available at any time of year, so I tried cod, halibut, hake, and haddock. I was happy to learn that any mild, firm whitefish worked as long as it was cut into chunks of similar thickness.

I cracked eight eggs into several pots of stew—with mixed results. In one batch, gelatinous eggs floated (and wobbled) atop the stew; in another, they boiled into rubber balls. The best approach turned out to be covering the pot and setting it over medium-low heat, which produced eggs with a silky texture. That frugal farmer was onto something.

At a final test kitchen tasting on a very cold winter day, a coworker called it "a bouillabaisse with love from a Southern grandma." She was right.

The basic building block of this hearty fish stew is bacon; its flavor (and fat) infuse the stew with deep savory notes. No one knows for sure when cooks began cracking whole eggs directly into the pot, but locals speculate that they were originally added so that a small day's catch could still feed a large crowd.

SHOPPING

Fish for Stew

Fish stew calls for fillets that will hold their shape during cooking. Look for thick, mild whitefish fillets such as bass, rockfish, cod, hake, haddock, or halibut. Thin, flaky fish like flounder, catfish, and tilapia are not good choices.

USE THESE: THICK AND FIRM
Firm fillets such as bass, cod, and haddock will keep their shape.

NO-GO: THIN AND FLAKY
Thin fillets such as flounder, catfish, and tilapia will fall apart.

ON THE ROAD

Fishing for Stew in Deep Run

EASTERN NORTH CAROLINA FISH STEW

Serves 8

Any mild, firm-fleshed whitefish, such as bass, rockfish, cod, hake, haddock, or halibut, will work well in this stew. Our favorite bacons are Farmland Thick Sliced Bacon and Plumrose Premium Thick Sliced Bacon. Serve this rustic stew with soft white sandwich bread or saltines.

- **6 slices thick-cut bacon, cut into ½-inch-wide strips**
- **2 onions, halved and sliced thin**
- **Salt**
- **⅓ teaspoon red pepper flakes**
- **6 cups water**
- **1 (6-ounce) can tomato paste**
- **1 pound red potatoes, unpeeled, sliced ¼ inch thick**
- **1 bay leaf**
- **1 teaspoon Tabasco sauce, plus extra for serving**
- **2 pounds skinless whitefish fillets, 1 to 1½ inches thick, cut into 2-inch chunks**
- **8 large eggs**

1. Cook bacon in Dutch oven over medium heat until crispy, 9 to 11 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add onions, 1½ teaspoons salt, and pepper flakes and cook until onions begin to soften, about 5 minutes.

2. Stir in water and tomato paste, scraping up any browned bits. Add potatoes and bay leaf. Increase heat to medium-high and bring to boil. Reduce heat to medium and cook at vigorous simmer for 10 minutes.

3. Reduce heat to medium-low and stir in Tabasco. Nestle fish into stew but do not stir. Crack eggs into stew, spacing them evenly. Cover and cook until eggs are just set, 17 to 22 minutes. Season with salt to taste. Serve, passing extra Tabasco separately.

And on the side . . .

North Carolina fish stew is a hearty, satisfying meal in itself, but tradition calls for serving it with slices of soft white bread, such as Wonder bread. Use it to soak up all the flavorful broth at the bottom of your bowl.

"Throwing a fish stew" is what they say in Deep Run, North Carolina, and it's as good an excuse as any for a low-key gathering. They usually happen in the fall, during vest season.

I walk behind the main house on a thick cushion of centipede grass. I spot Greg Smith and his father, Emmett, gathering supplies outside their party shack (formerly a tobacco packhouse). To one side sits a large, black iron kettle.

Emmett found this cauldron years ago in a "manure field," as he describes it, and this gets a rise out of the guests, all longtime friends who grew up together in the small town. He clarifies: It was technically a cow pasture, but you can see the connection. The pot was nearly completely buried when he unearthed it, but with determination and muscle, he scrubbed it back to life. Emmett estimates that his pot has held more than 500 stews.

Emmett and Greg fire up the propane burner under the pot and then drop in a pound and a half of chopped bacon to cook until its fat has rendered. Guests emerge from the kitchen in a procession, each bearing an offering for the stew: 10 pounds of sliced potatoes, 5 pounds of sliced onions, and 7 pounds of local rockfish. Emmett layers it all into the pot. One guest spoons in a couple of cans of tomato paste—his only job, but he performs it with authority.

Emmett throws in a heavy handful of red pepper flakes and stands guard as the stew simmers away. He eventually adds the final, and most unusual, ingredient: four dozen eggs, cracked and dropped one by one into the stew—just enough for 20 people.

–BRYAN ROOF

Clockwise from top: Greg Smith converted his tobacco packhouse into a neighborhood party shack. The 275-mile-long Neuse River is the longest river contained completely in North Carolina. Smith, cocktail in hand, tastes the stew for seasoning before serving it up. Emmett Smith, Greg's father, keeps careful watch over the stew as it simmers slowly in a huge cast-iron pot.

Photography: Steve Klise (On the Road)

HOMETOWN RECIPE

Southern Smothered Pork Chops

Pork chops in gravy should be extra-comforting. It just took a while to get them right.

BY DIANE UNGER

TO "SMOTHER" MEAT (usually chicken or pork) is to cook it low-and-slow in rich gravy until the meat is ridiculously tender. Unfortunately, that gravy is often just a cloak to mask subpar meat or, worse, a barrier obscuring perfectly good meat. What I wanted was thick, meaty, ultratender chops nestled in a rich, well-seasoned gravy made lightly nutty by a golden-brown roux.

To find the best chop for smothering, I started by testing rib, loin, and blade chops. Both the rib and loin chops cooked up tough and dry, no matter how gentle the heat. But blade chops have more fat and connective tissue and stand up really well to aggressive browning (which you need for good flavor) and long braising (for tenderizing).

Margaret Boyd of Mrs. B's Home Cooking in Montgomery, Alabama, is famous for her chops, and she generously explained her cooking process to me over the phone. Following her lead, I started by making a spice blend to season the chops. Her secret ingredient? Not so secret: It's Lawry's Seasoned Salt (see "One Entrée, Special Salt"). I mixed some with onion powder, granulated garlic, paprika, and pepper and made enough of it to season the chops, the flour I'd use to coat them before frying, and the gravy.

Although Boyd dredges her chops in flour and deep-fries them before braising, I opted to shallow-fry them in just ½ cup of oil, two at a time, until the exteriors were a deep golden brown. I then transferred them to a wire rack to await the gravy.

It's important to use blade-cut pork chops, which cook up ultratender.

All great gravies start with a roux, a cooked mixture of flour and fat; Boyd cooks hers until it is the color of peanut butter. I poured off all but ¼ cup of fat from the skillet before stirring in ½ cup of flour and cooking the mixture, stirring, until the kitchen started to smell like popcorn and the roux achieved the correct color (I kept a jar of Skippy handy). This took about 3 minutes. I then added the rest of the spice mixture and two sliced onions and cooked it all for 2 minutes before stirring in 3 cups of water (surprisingly, my tasters preferred water to broth, which was deemed too savory). I poured the gravy over the browned chops in a baking dish and covered the dish tightly with aluminum foil before transferring it to the oven.

I tested oven temperatures ranging from 250 to 400 degrees before settling on 350 degrees. In 1½ hours of hands-off time, the chops were supertender.

I carefully transferred the chops to a big platter while I finished my gravy by skimming some of the accumulated fat from the surface with a spoon and adding a splash of vinegar to brighten the flavor. I set a pot of cooked rice next to my steaming platter of pork chops and called over my tasters. The pork chops were so tender you could cut them with a thought. The gravy was thick, rich, silky, and packed with flavor. "I just want to curl up with these chops," said one taster.

SOUTHERN-STYLE SMOTHERED PORK CHOPS

Serves 4

Try to find chops of the same thickness for even cooking. For proper sauce consistency, it's important to measure the amount of fat left in the skillet before making the roux. Serve the chops and gravy with plenty of steamed white rice.

- 2 tablespoons Lawry's Seasoned Salt
- 1 tablespoon onion powder
- 1 teaspoon granulated garlic
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- Pepper
- 4 (8- to 10-ounce) bone-in blade-cut pork chops, ¾ to 1 inch thick, trimmed
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- ½ cup vegetable oil
- 2 onions, quartered through root end and sliced thin crosswise
- 3 cups water
- 1 tablespoon cider vinegar

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Set wire rack in rimmed baking sheet. Combine seasoned salt, onion powder, granulated garlic, paprika, and 1 teaspoon pepper in bowl. Pat chops dry with paper towels and sprinkle each chop with 1 teaspoon spice mixture (½ teaspoon per side).

2. Combine ½ cup flour and 4 teaspoons spice mixture in shallow dish. Dredge chops lightly in seasoned flour, shake off excess, and transfer to prepared rack.

3. Heat oil in 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Add 2 chops to skillet and fry until deep golden brown, 3 to 5 minutes per side. Let excess oil drip from chops, then return chops to rack. Repeat with remaining 2 chops.

4. Transfer fat left in skillet to liquid measuring cup. Return ¼ cup fat to skillet and stir in remaining ½ cup flour. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until roux is color of peanut butter, 3 to 5 minutes. Add onions and remaining 4 teaspoons spice mixture and cook, stirring constantly, until onions begin to soften slightly, about 2 minutes.

5. Slowly stir water into roux mixture until gravy is smooth and free of lumps. Bring to simmer and cook until gravy begins to thicken, about 2 minutes.

The American Table
One Entrée, Special Salt

Lawrence L. Frank opened Lawry's The Prime Rib restaurant in Beverly Hills in 1938. His novel concept? Offer only one entrée: whole standing ribs of beef, which were wheeled around the dining room on a 5-foot-long, 700-pound silver art deco cart and carved to order. Servers offered a "third shaker" of Frank's special salt mixture, which included sugar and spices. Lawry's began selling the salt in retail outlets, and the rest is seasoned salt history.

ON THE ROAD

A Soul Food Standout

You might pass by Mrs. B's Home Cooking if you're driving too fast, and that would be a shame. Housed in a bright yellow bungalow in Montgomery, Alabama, Mrs. B's has a billboard out front advertising "hot and ready" fare; inside, cooks like Bertha Seawright (above) deliver. A cafeteria-style "hot line" is set up in the homey dining room, with red plastic lunch trays stacked at one end, begging to be filled with smothered chicken or pork chops, collard greens that smack of smoky ham hocks and sugar (cuts their bitterness, I'm told), creamy fried corn, and macaroni and cheese. Everything comes with tender muffin-tin cornbread on the side—lightly crisp on the edges and flecked with kernels of corn. They say you can judge the worth of a Southern eatery by the quality of its cornbread, I use one piece to mop up the extra gravy on my tray, and I slip another into my pocket on the way out. To see more photos from our trip to Alabama, go to **CooksCountry.com/alabama**

–BRYAN ROOF

Pour half of gravy into 13 by 9 inch baking dish. Nestle browned chops in dish, overlapping slightly as needed. Pour remaining gravy over chops and cover dish tightly with aluminum foil. Bake until chops are fully tender, about 1½ hours

6. Carefully transfer chops to serving dish. (Chops will be delicate and may fall apart.) Use wide spoon to skim fat from surface of gravy. Add vinegar to gravy and season with pepper to taste. Pour gravy over chops. Serve.

Photography: Steve Klise (On the Road)

Chow-Chow

Don't toss your unripened tomatoes at first frost. We have a better idea.

BY ANNE WOLF

ONE SURE SIGN of autumn is a tomato plant full of unripened fruit. You'll be tempted to throw them out, but we've got a better idea: chow-chow. This relish of tart green tomatoes, vegetables, and spices is best known in the South but is also found as far afield as New Mexico and Pennsylvania. You'll see it alongside dishes as diverse as roast chicken, burgers, boiled potatoes, and crab cakes. Versions vary from kitchen to kitchen—some contain cabbage, some cauliflower, and others squash or hot peppers. One might be sweet, and another might be spicy. But green tomatoes are a constant.

I wanted to straddle the line between sweet and spicy, with complex flavor, a bit of tanginess, and vibrant colors. For inspiration, I took a virtual trip across the country. From the South, I took fruity red and slightly bitter green bell peppers. From the Southwest, jalapeños. Up North, I found crunchy cabbage. And along the way, I grabbed additions including celery seeds, turmeric, mustard seeds, sugar, and cayenne.

Achieving a crisp texture was not easy with vegetables minced into ¼- to ½-inch pieces. I started by simply simmering them with vinegar, sugar, and spices. The outcome was simple, all right—simply soupy. I needed to eliminate some of this moisture.

Salt coaxes moisture out of vegetables, so I tossed the chopped tomatoes, cabbage, and peppers with salt and set them in the fridge for 3 hours. I then squeezed the vegetables in a dish towel. The water was gone, but the treatment was too rough for the cabbage, leaving it limp, not crisp. A colander worked better.

Next, I cooked the vinegar with the spices and sugar for 5 minutes to create a pickle brine before taking it off the heat and stirring in the vegetables. This off-heat technique kept the cabbage crisp and the peppers and tomatoes firm. My chow-chow was just right, and with colors and flavors as invigorating as these, I'd just extended summer.

Serve this flavorful relish with chicken, fish, potatoes, or hot dogs.

CHOW-CHOW Makes about 3 cups

To double the recipe, double the amounts of all the ingredients, pulse the vegetables in step 1 in 6 batches, increase the simmering time in step 2 to about 8 minutes, and cook the mixture in a Dutch oven instead of a large saucepan.

- 18 ounces green tomatoes, cored and chopped coarse
- 1 cup coarsely chopped green cabbage
- 1 cup coarsely chopped green bell pepper
- ½ cup coarsely chopped red bell pepper
- ½ cup coarsely chopped onion
- 1 jalapeño chile, stemmed, seeded, and chopped coarse
- 1½ tablespoons salt
- ½ cup distilled white vinegar
- ½ cup sugar
- 1¼ teaspoons yellow mustard seeds
- ½ teaspoon celery seeds
- ¼ teaspoon ground turmeric
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper

1. Combine tomatoes, cabbage, bell peppers, onion, and jalapeño in bowl. Working in 3 batches, pulse vegetables in food processor until pieces measure ¼ to ½ inch, 4 to 6 pulses; transfer to separate bowl. Stir in salt, cover, and refrigerate for 3 hours.

2. Transfer vegetables to colander set in sink and let drain for 20 minutes. Bring vinegar, sugar, mustard seeds, celery seeds, turmeric, and cayenne to boil in large saucepan over high heat. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer until slightly thickened, about 5 minutes. Off heat, stir in drained vegetables.

3. Let relish cool completely, then refrigerate until ready to serve. (Relish can be refrigerated for up to 6 months.)

Relish Roundup

Cities across the country brighten things up with their own signature relishes. Here are a few:

PEPPER HASH
Philadelphia
Cabbage, bell pepper, vinegar, and sugar. Used on fish and "combo" dogs (hot dogs and fish cakes).

GIARDINIERA
Chicago
A sweet to hot mix of carrot, cauliflower, olives, bell pepper, and gherkins.

OLIVE RELISH
New Orleans
The classic olive-based topper for muffuletta sandwiches.

RUTT'S HUT RELISH
New Jersey
A mix of cabbage, carrots, onion, and mustard. Tops the "Ripper," a hot dog fried long enough for the skin to tear.

Classic Chicken Curry

American home cooks have been dishing up chicken curry for centuries. We wanted a quick weeknight version. BY CECELIA JENKINS

CURRY HAS DEEP roots in America. It enjoyed its first stateside vogue during the 19th century, when East Coast seaports from Charleston to Portland found themselves suddenly favored with new spices from Asia. Many cookbooks from that era, including *Mrs. Rorer's Philadelphia Cook Book* (1886) and *Mrs. Lincoln's Boston Cook Book* (1884), included recipes for chicken flavored with curry powder.

Curry powder was and still is a complex blend of spices (see "Curry Powder"). Many home cooks create their own blends, but we've had great success with store-bought mixes (our favorite is Penzeys Sweet Curry Powder). Simply tossing chicken with the stuff and cooking it off produces a good dish.

But good isn't good enough, I wanted something great. What's more, I wanted to round out my curry with traditional ingredients including potatoes, cauliflower, and peas to create a one-pot meal.

I started with the curry powder, which, as we know from many years of test kitchen work, benefits (as most spices do) from a quick cooking in fat to "bloom," or release its oils and aromas. Just 10 seconds in the bottom of a Dutch oven does the trick. Because I wanted savory onion flavor to infuse the entire dish, I tossed onions in next, cooking them until just soft. Garlic, ginger, and jalapeño, three curry staples, completed this flavor base.

I wanted my final curry to feature shredded chicken, but I also knew that cooking bone in, skin on chicken would give more flavor to the dish. So I added two split chicken breasts to the pot with the onions and curry, followed by a few cut-up Yukon Gold potatoes (we liked their flavor), half a head of cauliflower that I had cut into florets, and a couple of cups of water. I set everything to simmer and came back a while later to have a taste. But my hopes for an all-in-one method were dashed when I found rubbery chicken, mushy cauliflower, and underdone spuds. I'd have to use a staggered approach.

For the next go-round, I added chicken to the pot with 1½ cups of water (enough to braise it and then the potatoes). I brought the water to a simmer, covered the pot, and cooked the chicken for about 20 minutes before transferring it a plate. While the chicken cooled, I added the potatoes to the liquid in the pot and cooked them for 8 minutes before tossing in the cauliflower. Fifteen minutes later, the vegetables were tender. By now I'd taken the chicken off the bone and tossed the skin, and the meat was cool enough to tear into shreds. I stirred the meat (and the juices that had accumulated on the plate) back into the pot with a cup of frozen peas. Once everything was warmed through, it was ready to serve.

Or so I thought. While my curry was hearty and aromatic, it lacked a signature characteristic: tangy creaminess. A cup of whole-milk yogurt stirred in off the heat, plus a scattering of cilantro over the top, sealed the deal on this old-school classic.

Chunks of Yukon Gold potatoes, cauliflower florets, and a handful of frozen peas help turn this one-pot dish into a complete meal

INGREDIENT SPOTLIGHT

Curry Powder

Curry powders come in two basic styles: mild (or sweet) and a hotter version called Madras. We call for a mild version in our Classic Chicken Curry. It contains as many as 20 ground spices, herbs, and seeds such as turmeric, coriander, cumin, black and red peppers, cinnamon, cloves, fennel seeds, cardamom, ginger, and fenugreek. Our "vivid," well-rounded favorite is **Penzeys Sweet Curry Powder.**

CLASSIC CHICKEN CURRY

Serves 4

Do not substitute low-fat or nonfat yogurt for the whole-milk yogurt called for in this recipe or the finished dish will be much less creamy. The curry is best served with white rice.

- **3 tablespoons unsalted butter**
- **2 tablespoons curry powder**
- **2 onions, chopped**
- **1 jalapeño chile, stemmed, seeded, and minced**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **3 garlic cloves, minced**
- **1 tablespoon minced fresh ginger**
- **2 (10- to 12-ounce) bone-in split chicken breasts, trimmed**
- **1½ cups water**
- **8 ounces Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and cut into ½-inch chunks**
- **½ head cauliflower (1 pound), cored and cut into 1-inch florets**
- **1 cup frozen peas**
- **¼ cup minced fresh cilantro**
- **¾ cup plain whole-milk yogurt**

1. Melt butter in Dutch oven over medium heat. Add curry powder and cook until fragrant, about 10 seconds. Add onions, jalapeño, 1¼ teaspoons salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper and cook until vegetables are softened, about 5 minutes. Stir in garlic and ginger and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds.

2. Add chicken and water to pot. Increase heat to medium-high and bring mixture to boil. Reduce heat to low, cover, and simmer until chicken registers 160 degrees, 22 to 24 minutes, flipping chicken halfway through cooking. Transfer chicken to plate and let cool for 5 minutes. Once chicken has cooled, use two forks to shred meat into approximate 2-inch pieces; discard skin and bones.

3. Meanwhile, stir potatoes and ¼ teaspoon salt into curry, cover, and cook until potatoes are slightly tender, about 8 minutes. Stir in cauliflower and continue to cook, covered, until potatoes are fully cooked and cauliflower is tender, about 15 minutes longer, stirring occasionally.

4. Stir in peas, cilantro, and shredded chicken and cook until curry is warmed through, about 1 minute. Off heat, stir in yogurt. Season with salt and pepper to taste, and serve.

Pasta with Sausage Ragu

We wanted to pack all-day flavor into this sauce without spending all day on it.

BY ASHLEY MOORE

COMMON WISDOM SAYS that sausage ragu, hearty Sunday night staple, requires hours of cooking But I wanted to capture the long-cooked flavor of this Italian American sauce in less than 90 minutes. Goose chase? I set out to see

The first question to answer was, "What does long-cooked sauce taste like?" After cooking a handful of recipes calling for extended simmering and tasting them against quicker versions, we knew right away: The slow-simmered sauces were deep, savory, and meaty, while the fast ones were less complex and more acidic. Using flavorful sausage gave me a bit of an advantage, but I still had a long way to go

Every great sauce needs a flavor base of vegetables, in Italian, it's called a *soffritto*. After a test using the usual suspects—chopped onion, carrot, and celery—I realized that the carrot and celery weren't doing much. Just half an onion, plus half a fennel bulb and a tablespoon of fennel seeds, pulsed in the food processor gave me better-defined flavor. But I had other problems to solve.

For example, what kind of sausage should I use? After a few tests, I settled on sweet Italian. I then tested processing it like the vegetables versus breaking it up with a wooden spoon; we preferred using the processor, which helped evenly disperse the sausage throughout the finished dish.

I also had to decide on a tomato product. After experimenting with crushed tomatoes and whole peeled tomatoes (which I processed in the food processor), I found that the whole peeled tomatoes had a far silkier texture.

Ingredients settled, I set out to find long simmered flavor without the long simmering. The answer was simple, but it took just a small measure of up-front patience: careful browning By deeply browning the sausage and then adding the soffritto to cook thoroughly with the browned meat (scraping up the browned bits as I went), I was able to amplify the deep flavor of the sauce and add a subtle sweetness, too, thanks to the lightly caramelized sugars in the onions. I added the remaining ingredients and, after just 45 minutes of simmering, tossed the sauce with pasta and a bit of the pasta cooking water to help it achieve the perfect consistency. Tasters swore my sauce had been on the stove all day

PASTA WITH SAUSAGE RAGU

Serves 4 to 6

For a spicier sauce, substitute hot Italian sausage for sweet. You will have 3 cups of extra sauce, which can be used to sauce 1 pound of pasta

- ½ fennel bulb, stalks discarded, bulb cored and chopped coarse
- ½ onion, chopped coarse
- 1 tablespoon fennel seeds
- 1 (28-ounce) can whole peeled tomatoes
- 2 pounds sweet Italian sausage, casings removed
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for drizzling
- Salt and pepper
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 1½ teaspoons dried oregano
- ¾ cup red wine
- 1 pound pappardelle or tagliatelle
- Grated Parmesan cheese

1. Pulse fennel, onion, and fennel seeds in food processor until finely chopped, about 10 pulses, scraping down sides of bowl as needed; transfer to separate bowl. Process tomatoes in now-empty processor until smooth, about 10 seconds; transfer to second bowl. Pulse sausage in now-empty processor until finely chopped, about 10 pulses, scraping down sides of bowl as needed.

2. Heat oil in Dutch oven over medium-high heat until shimmering Add sausage and cook, breaking up meat with spoon, until all liquid has evaporated and meat begins to sizzle, 10 to 15 minutes

3. Add fennel mixture and ½ teaspoon salt and cook, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 5 minutes. (Fond on bottom of pot will be deeply browned.) Add tomato paste, garlic, and oregano and cook, stirring constantly, until fragrant, about 30 seconds.

Wide noodles like pappardelle or tagliatelle stand up best to this meaty sauce.

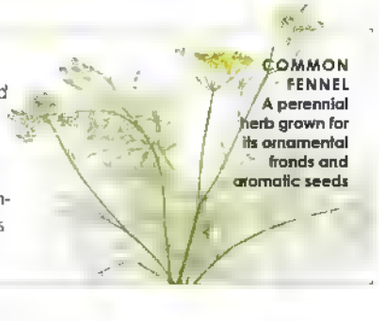
4. Stir in wine, scraping up any browned bits, and cook until nearly evaporated, about 1 minute. Add 1 cup water and pureed tomatoes and bring to simmer. Reduce heat to low and simmer gently, uncovered, until thickened, about 45 minutes. (Wooden spoon should leave trail when dragged through sauce.) Season with salt and pepper to taste; cover and keep warm

5. Bring 4 quarts water to boil in large pot. Add pasta and 1 tablespoon salt and cook, stirring often, until al dente. Reserve 1 cup cooking water, then drain pasta and return it to pot. Add 3 cups sauce and ½ cup reserved cooking water to pasta and toss to combine. Adjust consistency with remaining reserved cooking water as needed. Transfer to serving dish. Drizzle with extra oil, sprinkle with Parmesan, and serve. (Remaining 3 cups sauce can be refrigerated for up to 3 days or frozen for up to 1 month.)

FLORENCE FENNEL
A vegetable grown for its edible bulb, stems, and fronds

INGREDIENT SPOTLIGHT Fennel

The vegetable that we slice and eat raw or cooked is **Florence fennel**, or finocchio, its bulb, stems, and feathery fronds boast a mildly sweet, faint anise flavor Fennel seeds, which are a key part of the flavor profile of Italian sausage, come from a perennial herb called **common fennel** (also referred to as herb, sweet, or wild fennel) that has no bulb



COMMON FENNEL
A perennial herb grown for its ornamental fronds and aromatic seeds

Photo (far right): Shutterstock

Meatloaf Burgers

Ernest Hemingway was an acclaimed writer. But his culinary skills needed help.

BY CHRISTIE MORRISON

ERNEST "PAPA" HEMINGWAY had an appetite for deep sea fishing, bullfighting, and drinking. But I recently learned that he also had an appetite for a meatloaf like ham burger. The JFK Presidential Library in Boston released the recipe for Papa's Favorite Wild West Hamburgers to the public in 2013 in a collection of Hemingway's papers. The beef patty, cooked on the stovetop until it was, in his words, "crispy brown," included a pantry-clearing array of ingredients: capers, garlic, scallions, dried sage, Beau Monde seasoning, India relish, egg, and a healthy pour of wine in which the beef could sit, "quietly marinating." He shaped this meatloaf like mix into a burger and fried it until it was "juicy." What makes this a "Wild West" burger? We're not sure.

But while Papa knew prose, he was mistaken about protein; when I tried his recipe in the kitchen, all that liquid and acid yielded a mealy and wet—not juicy—burger. Still, for all its shortcomings, I saw the promise of a soft, flavorful, crispy-on-the-edges meatloaf burger.

Hemingway wasn't the only one to have the idea. I tested a range of other existing recipes for "meatloaf burgers." Some showed promise, but it wasn't until I turned to the test kitchen's collected meatloaf knowledge that I started to get my bearings.

I opted for 85 percent lean ground beef instead of a pork and beef combo. I mixed in ketchup and other potent stalwarts: Dijon mustard, Worcestershire sauce, parsley, and an egg for cohesion. While most of our meatloaf recipes call for sautéed onion, I substituted 1 teaspoon of onion powder.

To achieve the slightly soft, moist texture of meatloaf, I'd need to incorporate a panade—a matrix of starch (usually bread crumbs or crackers) and liquid—to trap moisture in the burger.

Like Hemingway, I wanted my burgers to have a crispy brown exterior; searing both sides of the burgers in a hot skillet accomplished this quickly. I transferred the browned burgers to the oven to gently cook to 160 degrees (our usual temperature for meatloaf).

One question remained: To have or have not? (A glaze, I mean.) We usually glaze our meatloaves with a ketchup, brown sugar, and cider vinegar mixture, but it covered up the crispy brown crust I'd just achieved. Instead, I mixed ketchup and vinegar with mayonnaise for a creamy spread that tasted both new and familiar.

The finished meatloaf burger had the slightly soft yet juicy texture we expect from meatloaf and that signature crispy crust. I think Papa would be proud.

MEATLOAF BURGERS Serves 4

Ian's makes the test kitchen's favorite panko bread crumbs

- ½ cup panko bread crumbs
- 2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- 6 tablespoons ketchup
- ¼ cup minced fresh parsley
- 1 large egg
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- Salt and pepper
- 1½ pounds 85 percent lean ground beef
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- ¼ cup mayonnaise
- 2 teaspoons cider vinegar
- 4 hamburger buns, toasted

1. Combine panko and Worcestershire in large bowl until panko is thoroughly moistened. Stir in 2 tablespoons ketchup, parsley, egg, mustard, onion powder, ¾ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper. Add beef and knead with your hands until just combined.

2. Shape beef mixture into four ¾-inch thick patties, about 4½ inches in diameter. Press center of each patty down with your fingertips until about ½ inch thick, creating slight divot in patty. (Patties can be covered and refrigerated for up to 24 hours.)

3. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Set wire rack in aluminum foil–lined rimmed baking sheet. Heat oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Transfer patties to skillet and cook without moving them until browned on first side, about 3 minutes. Flip patties and cook without moving them until browned on second side, about 3 minutes. Transfer patties to prepared rack and bake until meat registers 160 degrees, 15 to 20 minutes.

4. Meanwhile, whisk mayonnaise, vinegar, ¼ teaspoon pepper, and remaining ¼ cup ketchup together in bowl.

5. Transfer burgers to plate and let rest for 5 minutes. Serve on buns with sauce.

Like Hemingway, these juicy burgers have a crusty exterior, which we achieve with a hot sear.

The American Table
Hemingway's Appetites

In Cuba, Hemingway was probably more well-known for the number of cocktails named for him than for the burger recipe he developed. A barfly at the El Floridita bar in Havana in the 1930s, Hemingway nurtured a passion for daiquiris. His preferred method? Hold the sugar and double the rum. Legend has it that a bartender at El Floridita named the "Papa Doble" daiquiri in Hemingway's honor. Another cocktail at the same bar—the "Hemingway Special"—was a variation on that daiquiri that included maraschino liqueur, grapefruit juice, and less rum.

Photo (bottom): Tore Johnson/The LIFE Images Collection/Getty

Sticky Chicken

Moist and tender chicken with a sweet-salty sheen sounds tricky, but we made it easy.

BY D ANE LNGER

STICKY CHICKEN ISN T just a great recipe name, it's a great dish, too—deeply flavored roasted chicken with a sticky, slightly sweet, lacquered exterior. It wasn't hard finding existing recipes for this dish but good recipes? That was a steeper hill to climb

Most of the recipes I found called for marinating chicken pieces in a mixture of soy sauce, ketchup, and some sort of sweetener (such as brown sugar or honey) for at least 30 minutes; searing them on the stovetop to begin crisping the skin, and then covering the pan or transferring the pan to the oven to finish cooking the chicken. In some cases the chicken was dry and unevenly cooked, and in others it was inedibly salty. I wanted a happy medium. well seasoned meat, nicely rendered skin, and a sweet and sticky sauce And it had to be easy and fast enough for a weeknight meal

My first big decision was to switch from chicken parts to just bone-in chicken thighs, which rarely dry out. Eight would be enough to serve four people. I also took marinating off the table (no time for that). But I did want the chicken to be packed with flavor So I whisked together a braising liquid of cider vinegar, honey, soy sauce, and ketchup—all pantry staples—tasting the sauce as I went along to ensure the right balance of sweet and salty. I added granulated garlic and red pepper flakes for a punch of flavor

I assumed that searing the chicken skin side down on the stovetop before adding the braising liquid would give me wonderfully crispy skin (initially), but I could fit only six thighs in my skillet in order to get even browning What's more, I'd be dousing them with braising liquid anyway, so why bother chasing crispiness? I decided to ditch this step.

Instead, I laid eight chicken thighs skin side down in my cold skillet. My idea was to cook the chicken slowly in my flavorful sauce to begin rendering the fat from the skin. Then I'd turn the chicken skin side up to finish cooking with the skin above the level of the cooking liquid, presumably drying it out a bit and browning it in the process. My coworkers were skeptical, but I was determined.

I set the skillet in a 425 degree oven After about 20 minutes skin side down and 20 minutes skin side up, my chicken had reached an internal temperature of 175 degrees. But it looked awful I kept cooking the chicken for a few more minutes until the skin turned an appetizing brown (chicken thighs can withstand longer cooking, and they actually get more tender when cooked to a higher temperature). Satisfied with the appearance of the skin, I transferred the chicken to a platter and turned my attention to finishing the sauce.

What had started as 1¾ cups of sauce had swelled to 3 cups of liquid from the addition of the chicken's juices. I ran the liquid through a fat separator, returned the defatted liquid to the skillet along with a small amount of cornstarch, and reduced it to ¾ cup, at which point it was just thick enough to coat the chicken and give it the shiny glaze I was looking for

I gathered my tasters for servings of chicken with some extra sauce for dipping and a sprinkling of toasted sesame seeds. Thumbs up all around. The chicken was tender, and the sauce was balanced and just sweet enough. Mission accomplished: Sweet, savory sticky chicken in less than an hour.

For a sweet, sour, salty, and sticky glaze, we use cider vinegar, honey, soy sauce, and ketchup.

STICKY CHICKEN Serves 4

Trim any fatty pockets from the edges of the chicken thighs to ensure well-rendered skin. Cooking the thighs to 195 degrees melts the tough connective tissues while keeping the meat moist. This dish is best served with white rice

- 8 (5- to 7-ounce) bone-in chicken thighs, trimmed
- Pepper
- ¾ cup cider vinegar
- ½ cup honey
- ¼ cup soy sauce
- ¼ cup ketchup
- 1 teaspoon granulated garlic
- ¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 1 teaspoon cornstarch
- 1 teaspoon water
- 2 teaspoons toasted sesame seeds

1. Adjust oven rack to upper middle position and heat oven to 425 degrees. Season chicken with pepper and arrange skin side down in 12 inch ovensafe skillet. Whisk vinegar, honey, soy sauce, ketchup, granulated garlic, and pepper flakes together in bowl and pour over chicken. (Skillet will be full.)

2. Bake chicken for 20 minutes. Flip chicken skin side up and continue to bake until skin is spotty brown and meat registers 195 to 200 degrees, 20 to 25 minutes longer. Transfer chicken to serving platter. Carefully pour pan juices into fat separator (skillet handle will be hot) and let settle for 5 minutes

3. Dissolve cornstarch in water in small bowl. Return defatted juices to skillet and whisk in cornstarch mixture Bring sauce to boil over high heat and cook until syrupy and spatula leaves trail when dragged through sauce, 7 to 9 minutes. (You should have about ¾ cup sauce.) Season with pepper to taste.

4. Off heat, return chicken to skillet and turn to coat with sauce. Flip chicken skin side up and sprinkle with sesame seeds. Serve

Keys to Tender, Flavorful Sticky Chicken

GET THE TEMPERATURE RIGHT

We cook the chicken thighs to 195 degrees (well beyond the temperature at which they're safe to eat) to melt their tough connective tissues while keeping the meat moist

THICKEN THE GLAZE

For a sticky, shiny glaze that is sure to cling tightly to the cooked chicken, we reduce the cornstarch-thickened sauce until it's syrupy and a spatula leaves a trail when dragged through it

Mozzarella Sticks

We wanted to enjoy this warm, crunchy, gooey restaurant favorite at home.

BY ASHLEY MOORE

WHEN WORD GOT out that I was working on a recipe for mozzarella sticks, a restaurant favorite that few people make at home, I quickly became the most popular cook in the test kitchen.

I started by testing five existing recipes. The results ranged from exploded sticks of cheese with barely any bread crumbs to chunky, bread-heavy spears with hardly any cheese. But while the results were disappointing, I learned a trick or two.

For one thing, a handful of these recipes called for freezing the coated mozzarella sticks before frying—frozen sticks proved less likely to explode during frying. And while some recipes call for string cheese, my tasters and I preferred sticks cut from a block of actual mozzarella. For the breading, standard bread crumbs proved dusty and prone to sogginess; panko-style crumbs provided the most rewarding crunch. I stitched together a working recipe and hit the kitchen.

I cut the mozzarella into ½-inch-wide planks and cut each plank into three "sticks." I coated each stick using our standard breading procedure (dredge in flour, dip in beaten egg, and press on bread crumbs) and placed the breaded sticks in the freezer. After an hour, I fried them. The panko, though pleasantly crunchy, was too coarse to make a solid coating and left gaps where the cheese could leak out. I decided to give the bread crumbs a spin in the food processor until they were finely ground, hoping they'd form a more cohesive coating. This did the trick.

I dropped one last batch of mozzarella sticks into the frying oil. After just 1 minute in the 400-degree oil, they were a lovely shade of golden brown. I used a spider to remove the sticks, set them on paper towels to let them cool slightly, called down my team, and waited for feedback. It was positive, and it came not in words but in smiles.

MOZZARELLA STICKS

Serves 4 to 6

Do not use fresh or part-skim mozzarella in this recipe; their high moisture content can cause the sticks to rupture in the hot oil. This recipe was developed with Sorrento Galbani Whole Milk Mozzarella, which is the test kitchen's favorite. We do not recommend using string cheese. Use a Dutch oven that holds 6 quarts or more for this recipe.

- **1 pound whole-milk mozzarella cheese**
- **½ cup all-purpose flour**
- **2 large eggs**
- **2 cups panko bread crumbs**
- **½ teaspoon salt**
- **½ teaspoon pepper**
- **¼ teaspoon dried oregano**
- **¼ teaspoon garlic powder**
- **2 quarts peanut or vegetable oil**
- **1 cup jarred marinara sauce, warmed**

1. Set wire rack in rimmed baking sheet and line half of rack with triple layer of paper towels. Slice mozzarella crosswise into six ½-inch-wide planks. Cut each plank lengthwise into 3 equal sticks. (You will have 18 pieces.)

2. Spread flour in shallow dish. Beat eggs in second shallow dish. Pulse panko, salt, pepper, oregano, and garlic powder in food processor until finely ground, about 10 pulses; transfer to third shallow dish.

3. Working with 1 piece at a time, coat sticks with flour, shaking to remove excess; dip in eggs, allowing excess to drip off, and dredge in panko mixture, pressing to adhere. Transfer to plate. Freeze sticks until firm, at least 1 hour or up to 2 hours.

4. Add oil to large Dutch oven until it measures about 1½ inches deep and heat over medium-high heat to 400 degrees. Add 6 sticks to hot oil and fry until deeply browned on all sides, about 1 minute. Adjust burner as necessary to maintain oil temperature between 375 and 400 degrees.

5. Transfer sticks to paper towel–lined side of prepared rack to drain for 30 seconds, then move to unlined side of rack. Return oil to 400 degrees and repeat frying in 2 more batches with remaining 12 sticks. Serve with marinara.

Freezing the breaded sticks for an hour before frying keeps the coating intact.

TO MAKE AHEAD

Mozzarella sticks can be prepared through step 3 and frozen in zipper-lock bag or airtight container for up to 1 month. After frying (do not thaw sticks), let sticks rest for 3 minutes before serving to allow residual heat to continue to melt centers.

PROBLEM SOLVING Mozzarella Sticks Gone Wrong

PROBLEM
Coarse coating doesn't fully cover cheese and leaves gaps.
SOLUTION
Process panko in food processor until finely ground.

PROBLEM
Sticks explode and create gooey mess.
SOLUTION
Use whole-milk mozzarella cheese and briefly freeze sticks after breading them.

PROBLEM
Cheese sticks are greasy and soggy.
SOLUTION
Fry in 400-degree oil for crispy—not greasy—results.

Devils on Horseback

This retro appetizer is easy to love. We wanted it to be easy to make, too.

BY CECELIA JENKINS

DEVILS ON HORSEBACK are dates or prunes stuffed with cheese and wrapped in bacon. Alone, each ingredient—supersweet dates, pungent blue cheese, and salty, meaty bacon—is capable of an intense cocktail hour performance. But when they play together, they have the potential to be transformative. Or disastrous.

Making this appetizer can be tedious, time-consuming, and messy, and you run the risk of ending up with burnt or flabby bacon, grease-soaked dates, and cheese that oozes onto the pan to burn. I set out to create a quick and effective assembly process that would keep all the parts in the right places.

After trying a range of recipes, I found prunes too difficult to work with, and my tasters balked at the ropey texture of larger Medjool dates. I settled on more common pitted Deglet Noor dates for their manageable size, tender texture, and ample room for stuffing.

But stuffing cheese into the dates' small holes gave me a headache. Splitting the dates open with a paring knife proved to be the answer (their natural stickiness helped them seal back up nicely), but portioning the creamy blue cheese was a pain. Using a ¼ teaspoon measure to scoop portions of it left more on my fingers than in the dates, and trying to cut the wedge into pieces gunked up my knife and turned my cutting board into a sticky disaster zone. A coworker suggested freezing the cheese. Exasperated, I threw the chunk of cheese in the freezer and walked away. We both needed to chill out.

I returned a bit later to take another swing and, happily, found the fresh out of the freezer cheese much easier to work with. It was easy to crumble the cold cheese, and the crumbles fit perfectly in the dates and stayed put.

Wrapping the filled dates in bacon slices and securing each with a toothpick, I placed them directly on a baking sheet and baked them at 450 degrees, assuming that the high temperature and direct contact with the hot sheet would quickly crisp the bacon. Reaching into a smoky oven to flip them, I found nothing but burnt devils swimming in grease.

I needed to slow the cooking and get the devils out of the grease. I reduced the oven temperature to 400 degrees and grabbed a wire rack, setting it in my baking sheet to elevate the devils and allow them to shed grease. And rather than use a full slice of bacon for each date, I cut the slices in half crosswise. They overlapped just a bit but rendered beautifully nonetheless, with no residual gumminess. And with the rack in play, I didn't need to individually flip each devil over halfway through baking.

Since I was opening, stuffing, wrapping, and skewering 32 devils, I was looking for just one step fewer. Hopeful, I assembled another batch (omitting the toothpick skewering step) and positioned them seam side down on the rack. To my satisfaction, as the bacon cooked, it closed tightly around the dates, making the toothpicks superfluous. I instead placed toothpicks on the serving platter for my tasters to use to spear and eat the devils—which they devoured in mere minutes.

One last discovery: I found that you can freeze the fully assembled devils and bake them straight from the freezer for a holiday crowd pleaser in minutes.

Elevating the devils on a wire rack while baking gives us crisp, not soggy, results

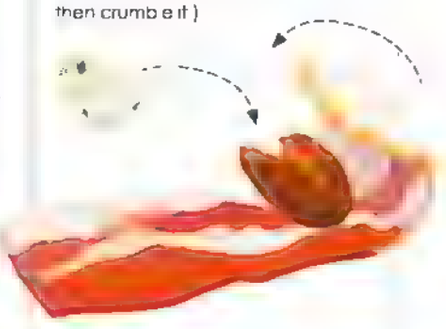
Illustration: Lauren Pettapiece

Assembling Devils on Horseback

Rather than building one devil at a time, we prefer an assembly-line approach, completing each step for all 32 devils before moving on.

1. Cut through one long side of each date.

2. Stuff each date with blue cheese and squeeze the opening to seal it. (To make the cheese easier to work with, freeze it for 20 minutes and then crumble it.)



3. Place the date on the end of a half-slice of bacon. Roll to enclose the date.

4. Bake the devils seam side down on a wire rack so that the bacon fuses while cooking, making sealing them with toothpicks unnecessary.

DEVILS ON HORSEBACK

Makes 32 pieces

Use tender dates that measure at least 1¼ inches in length; smaller, drier dates are difficult to stuff. Do not use Medjool dates or thick-cut bacon in this recipe. Freezing the blue cheese for 20 minutes makes it easier to crumble. Our preferred supermarket blue cheese is Stella Blue.

- **4 ounces blue cheese**
- **32 pitted Deglet Noor dates, about 1¼ inches long**
- **16 slices bacon**

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 400 degrees. Set wire rack in aluminum foil–lined rimmed baking sheet. Freeze blue cheese until firm, about 20 minutes.

2. Cut through 1 long side of each date and open like book. Crumble blue cheese and divide evenly among dates. Close dates around blue cheese and squeeze lightly to seal (dates should be full but not overflowing).

3. Lay bacon slices on cutting board and halve each slice crosswise. Working with 1 date at a time, place blue cheese–filled date on end of 1 halved bacon slice and roll to enclose date. Place wrapped dates seam side down on prepared rack.

4. Bake until bacon is browned, 27 to 30 minutes, rotating sheet halfway through baking. Let cool for 10 minutes. Serve with toothpicks.

TO MAKE AHEAD

Devils on Horseback can be assembled through step 3 and frozen seam side down on rimmed baking sheet. Frozen pieces can be transferred to zipper-lock bag and frozen for up to 1 month. Increase baking time by 8 to 10 minutes.

Getting to Know Dried Herbs

Dried herbs can be more complex and flavorful than fresh. We use them in many dishes—and not just in a pinch.

BY CHRISTIE MORRISON

Oregano

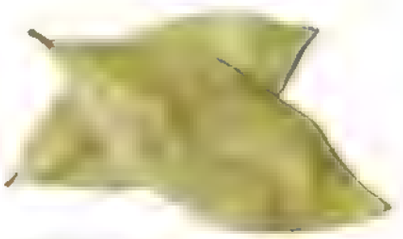
DUAL IDENTITY

Most of the oregano found in U.S. stores is native to Europe, but you can also find Mexican oregano. The two plants are from different genuses, but both contain carvacrol, the essential oil that gives oregano its characteristic flavor. We found European oregano earthy, slightly sweet, and milder than robust Mexican oregano, but the two can be used interchangeably.

Rosemary

PINEY NEEDLES

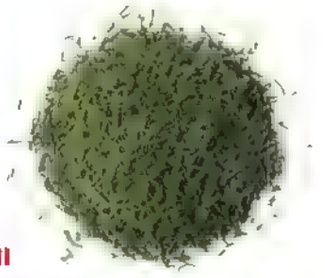
Dried rosemary isn't a bad substitute for fresh in terms of flavor, but the hard, dried needles work best in long-cooked dishes like soups, stews, and braises, where they can soften during cooking. Dried rosemary flavors our Montreal Seasoned Salt Blend (**CooksCountry.com/montrealsalt**) and goes well with most grilled meats. Use it sparingly.



Turkish Bay Leaves

LAUREL AND HEARTY

When a recipe calls for bay leaves, it generally means Turkish bay, with its tea-like (with a hint of menthol) flavor. Bay leaves don't play a leading role but contribute to the overall savory flavor of stocks and soups. We particularly like them in our Arroz con Pollo (**CooksCountry.com/arrozconpollo**). To maintain potency, freeze bay leaves in a zipper-lock bag.



Dill

RANCH HAND

Dried dill is a signature flavor in Eastern European and Scandinavian cuisines, where it lends bright, lemony, and grassy notes to all kinds of dishes. It's also one of the classic flavors in ranch dressing; we use it in our Buttermilk-Ranch Pita Chips (**CooksCountry.com/ranchpitachips**). Dried dill also works well with eggs, vegetables, poultry, and seafood.

Thyme

LESS IS MORE

Thyme's pungent, floral flavors make it well suited to red meat and poultry dishes. It's also common in blends like herbes de Provence, bouquet garni, and za'atar. Use a third as much dried thyme when substituting for fresh; its flavor is much more intense. Dried thyme contributes to the bold herb flavor of our Smoked Roast Beef (**CooksCountry.com/smokedroastbeef**).

Sage

THERE'S THE RUB

Sage leaves are sold whole, rubbed, or ground. To produce rubbed sage, the dried leaves are crumbled, while ground sage may include both finely ground leaves and stems. We prefer sage in its whole leaf form, but rubbed sage is a solid substitute for whole. Ground sage is dusty and bland, so we don't recommend it. When substituting for fresh sage, increase the amount called for by half.

California Bay Leaves

BOLD IMPOSTOR

These large, aromatic leaves are harvested from an evergreen tree native to California. Much more difficult to come by than Turkish bay leaves, dried California bay leaves have a potent, eucalyptus-like flavor that our tasters registered as medicinal, "like something you'd put in a cough drop." We advise against using California bay leaves unless specified in a recipe.

Tarragon

LICORICE LEAF

Tarragon, with its signature licorice flavor, is an herb we often use in its fresh form, but we've found that dried tarragon is a great addition to rubs, spice blends, and dressings, notably our recipe for Romaine Salad with Green Goddess Dressing (**CooksCountry.com/romainegoddess**). Be sure to store all dried herbs in a cool, dark, dry place; heat, light, and moisture can shorten their shelf life.

Marjoram

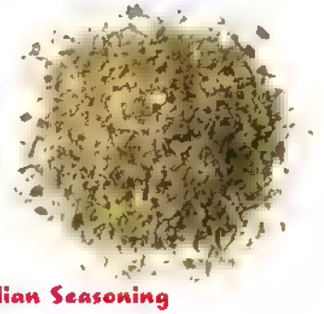
UNSUNG HERO

This pungent herb is especially good in bean, lamb, and beef dishes. A core ingredient in poultry seasoning and Bell's seasoning, marjoram is related to both oregano and mint, but its earthy, slightly musty flavor is more like that of oregano. Like other dried herbs, marjoram's flavor will fade over time; to test for freshness, rub some between your fingers. If it still smells bright, use it; otherwise, trash it.

Herbes de Provence

FRENCH MELANGE

This herb mix includes rosemary, marjoram, thyme, lavender, and fennel. We use it in our Slow-Cooker Ratatouille (**CooksCountry.com/slowratatouille**). If you can't find herbes de Provence, replace it with 2 teaspoons dried marjoram, 2 teaspoons dried thyme, 1 teaspoon dried basil, 1 teaspoon dried rosemary (crumbled), 1 teaspoon dried sage, ⅛ teaspoon ground fennel, and a pinch of lavender.



Italian Seasoning

POWER PLAYER

This blend combines all the characteristic flavors of Italy in a single jar. It typically contains oregano, marjoram, rosemary, basil, sage, thyme, and savory. These hearty flavors work best in long-cooking dishes, but you can add Italian seasoning to roasted potatoes or vegetables for a Mediterranean twist. Substitute Italian seasoning for oregano in our Mozzarella Sticks (page 14) for more complex flavor.

DON'T DO IT

Delicate leafy herbs such as basil, cilantro, and parsley become bland and musty when dried. Since they're generally used to finish a dish, substituting a dried version is texturally problematic, and dried versions also lack the intensity of their fresh counterparts. If you can't use fresh, consider a different flavor profile.

Illustration: Lindsey Chandler

Marinated Beet Salad

Could we bring people together over these divisive roots? BY KATIE LEAIRD

BEETS CAN BE a tough sell Haters say they taste like dirt and are a pain to prepare. But my Estonian American mother loves beets, and I know in my Baltic heart that they have the poten tial to be sweet, earthy jewels

Much of beets' baggage lies in their skins, which must be removed. Just taking a peeler to them will work, but it will also dye your hands a semipermanent purple. What's more, when I peeled and roasted a few beets (I chose roasting to concentrate their sweetness), the outside layer became tough and leathery.

It turns out that beet skins do a bang-up job of protecting the insides while the beets are in the oven, yielding deeply sweet, evenly cooked vegetables. And as the beets' juice converts to steam in the oven, the skins loosen their grip, making them easy to remove. I found that wrapping the skin-on beets in foil with a little water made things even easier; while the beets were still warm, I easily slipped the skins off without using any tool other than my hands.

What makes beets so beautiful is also what makes them such a mess. the vibrant red hued juice, which stains hands and clothes (and cutting boards). To minimize staining, I held each warm beet in one hand with a paper towel and used another paper towel to rub off its skin. I did this over the foil I'd just unwrapped to catch any juice dribbles and keep my cutting board clean.

Once they were skinned, I cut up the still-warm beets and tossed them with sherry vinegar, olive oil, and fresh thyme. The dressing's vinegar balanced the vegetable's sweetness, and the thyme played perfectly with the beets' earthy flavors

To create a sturdy framework for these rubies, I laid down a bed of peppery arugula. I drizzled the remaining marinade (whatever the beets hadn't soaked up) over the greens and scattered the beets over top. Just before serving, I added orange segments, Pecorino Romano cheese, and chopped walnuts. Hate away, beet foes. More salad for me.

Beets are not the only root vegetables we've learned about other options at **CooksCountry.com/rootveg.**

MARINATED BEET SALAD WITH ORANGES AND PECORINO Serves 6

To ensure even cooking look for beets of similar size—roughly 2 to 3 inches in diameter. Red or golden beets work equally well in this recipe. Peel the cooked beets over the leftover foil packet to minimize mess

- 1 pound beets, trimmed
- ½ cup water
- ¼ cup sherry vinegar
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for drizzling
- 1 teaspoon fresh thyme leaves
- Salt and pepper
- 2 oranges
- 4 ounces (4 cups) baby arugula
- 2 ounces Pecorino Romano cheese, shaved with vegetable peeler
- ½ cup walnuts, toasted and chopped coarse

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 400 degrees. Place 16 by 12 inch piece of aluminum foil on rimmed baking sheet. Arrange beets in center of foil and lift sides of foil to form bowl. Add water to beets and crimp foil tightly to seal. Roast until beets can be pierced easily with fork, 1¼ to 1½ hours

2. Once beets are cool enough to handle, rub off skins with paper towels Halve each beet vertically, then cut into ½ inch thick wedges.

3. Whisk vinegar, oil, thyme, ½ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper together in large bowl. Add beets and toss to combine. Cover and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes or up to 24 hours

4. Cut away peel and pith from oranges Holding fruit over bowl, use paring knife to slice between membranes to release segments; set aside. Arrange arugula on serving platter Spoon beets over arugula and drizzle with remaining marinade. Arrange orange segments over salad and top with Pecorino and walnuts. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Drizzle with extra oil and serve.

MARINATED BEET SALAD WITH PEAR AND FETA

Substitute 1 halved, cored, and thinly sliced pear for oranges; ¾ cup crumbled feta for Pecorino; and 2 tablespoons toasted pistachios for walnuts

MARINATED BEET SALAD WITH RASPBERRIES AND BLUE CHEESE

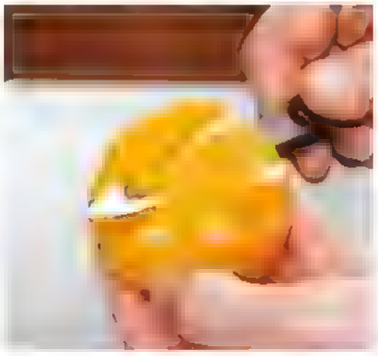
Substitute ⅔ cup raspberries for oranges, ¾ cup crumbled blue cheese for Pecorino, and skinned hazelnuts for walnuts

Shaved Pecorino Romano cheese adds a salty, creamy element to this vibrant salad.

TEST KITCHEN TECHNIQUES

How to Segment an Orange

Using a paring knife, cut toward the center, between the pulp and the membrane of each segment



How to Peel Beets

Peel roasted beets by rubbing them with paper towels. The skins should slide right off For easy cleanup, do this over the foil used for roasting the beets.

Potato and Leek Gratin

There's nothing wrong with your standard potato gratin. But we wanted something a bit more elegant. BY ASHLEY MOORE

AN IDEAL POTATO gratin is soft and creamy inside and cheesy, crunchy, and crispy on top. Throw some tender leeks into the mix and you'll get their mild, slightly grassy, onion like flavor in every bite. Seems easy enough, right? Not so fast.

I surrounded myself with stacks of French cookbooks full of potato gratin recipes and selected five that varied in method and ingredients. In one mad afternoon I cleaned dozens of leeks, sliced pounds of potatoes, grated mas sive blocks of cheese, baked five gratins, and set them out for my tasters. One looked like mashed potatoes. Another had dark, woody leek shards poking out around the perimeter. One featured a broken, stodgy sauce. And despite all those leeks, none had any leek flavor to speak of; it was especially lacking in the gratins with the most cream. So I learned at least one thing: Broth would be my primary base, and if I was going to use any cream, it wouldn't be much.

Back at my workstation, I cut up another 2 pounds of potatoes and thinly sliced an equal amount of leeks. I thoroughly soaked and cleaned my sliced leeks before cooking them in a skillet with white wine, chicken broth, and a bit of cream to create a leeky sauce. I tossed the potatoes and leeks together in a baking dish, sprinkled the top with shredded Gruyère cheese, and then baked the gratin until the potatoes were tender. My gratin looked promis ing straight out of the oven, but as I spooned portions out of the dish, I was struck by the unpleasant color—a light green, slightly yellow hue that looked more like a mistake than a triumph. What's more, the leeks were unappeal ingly slimy.

To help avoid slippery leeks in my next test, I tried cutting them into bigger pieces, about ½ inch thick. And rather than stir the sauce into the leeks on the stovetop, I simply softened the leeks in the skillet by themselves (with a bit of garlic for punch) and then trans ferred them to a bowl. I then cooked my sauce—wine, broth, and cream—in the now-empty skillet.

I layered half the softened leeks on the bottom of my baking dish, topped them with half the sliced potatoes, repeated the process, and poured the sauce over the top. I topped it all with a generous sprinkling of Gruyère and baked it until the potatoes were tender and the cheesy top was covered in lovely brown spots. After letting it cool for 15 minutes, we dug in: perfect potatoes, vibrant and flavorful leeks, a luxurious sauce—and not a bit of slime to be found.

POTATO AND LEEK GRATIN

Serves 6 to 8

Do not prepare the potatoes ahead of time or store them in water; the potato starch is essential for thicken ing the sauce. A mandoline makes quick work of slicing the potatoes.

- **2 tablespoons unsalted butter**
- **2 pounds leeks, white and light green parts only, quartered lengthwise, sliced ½ inch thick, and washed thoroughly**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **4 garlic cloves, minced**
- **½ cup dry white wine**
- **1 cup chicken broth**
- **½ cup heavy cream**
- **2 pounds large Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and sliced ⅛ inch thick**
- **2 teaspoons minced fresh thyme**
- **4 ounces Gruyère cheese, shredded (1 cup)**

1. Adjust oven rack to middle posi tion and heat oven to 350 degrees. Grease 13 by 9 inch baking dish. Melt butter in 12 inch skillet over medium high heat. Add leeks and ¾ teaspoon salt and cook, stirring occasionally, until softened, 5 to 7 minutes. Add garlic and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds, transfer to bowl.

2. Return skillet to medium high heat, add wine, and cook until nearly evaporated, about 2 minutes, scraping up any browned bits. Add broth and cream and bring to simmer; cook until slightly thickened and reduced to 1¼ cups, 3 to 5 minutes.

3. Toss potatoes, thyme, 1 teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper together in separate bowl. Spread half of leeks evenly in prepared dish. Arrange half of potatoes over leeks. Spread remaining leeks over potatoes. Arrange remain ing potatoes evenly over leeks. Pour broth-cream mixture over potatoes and sprinkle with Gruyère.

4. Bake until potatoes are tender and cheese is spotty brown, about 45 min utes. Let cool for 15 minutes. Serve.

Cooking the leeks and the sauce separately before combining the components to bake is key

TEST KITCHEN TECHNIQUE **Preparing Leeks**

Only the white and pale green parts of a leek are tender. Save the tough, dark green leaves in the freezer for making stock.

FIRST CHOP

Cut away the dark green leaves. Quarter the white and pa e green port ons lengthwise. Slice ½ inch thick.

THEN WASH

Place the leeks in a salad spinner ful of water, swishing to wash. Lift the basket to dra n the leeks, leaving any dirt behind. Spin dry.

Rice and Sausage Casserole

Is it a stuffing? A dressing? This surprising dish is neither, but it belongs on the Thanksgiving table.

BY MORGAN BOLLING

THOUGH I HAVE a large and varied repertoire of rice-based side dishes—a fortunate result of my Carolina childhood—I wanted to create a new one that was versatile, flavorful, and easy enough to slide into a Thanksgiving lineup. I pored over recipes ranging from old family favorites to recipes from Southern cuisine stalwarts like Nathalie Dupree and John Folse.

My tests illuminated two things: Tasters liked simple recipes that mirrored the flavors of Thanksgiving dressing. And some loved the meatiness in recipes like dirty rice, a New Orleans favorite that includes sautéed chicken livers or giblets (some, of course, did not love this direction—giblets can be divisive). I decided to pursue a hybrid version.

My first hurdle was the rice, which I assumed I'd have to precook. For such a simple ingredient, rice can be a headache—even some of the pros in the test kitchen have trouble (I've seen the scorched pots to prove it). One option was to cook the rice using the standard absorption method. Another was to boil the rice in water and drain it like pasta. Both vexed me. So when a coworker suggested I assemble my casserole with raw rice and plenty of liquid, I was game but doubtful.

I combined 4 cups of water, 2 cups of raw rice, some browned sausage, and some celery and onions that I had sautéed with garlic, sage, and seasonings in a baking dish, covered the dish, and slid it into a 350-degree oven for an hour.

The results were promising—nicely steamed rice and plenty of flavor. Some grains were uncooked, and the flavor was inconsistent, but a few adjustments solved these bugaboos: First, I swapped the water for 3 cups of chicken broth, which gave the dish a more savory backbone. I then added a little white wine for acidity and sweetness and some cream, which helped the overall texture. Boiling this liquid before pouring it over the rice-and-sausage mixture helped even out the cooking and shortened the time as well—from more than an hour to 40 minutes. To freshen everything up before serving, I used a fork to fluff up the rice and incorporate some chopped parsley.

A Thanksgiving stuffing? Not quite. But I have no doubt that this flavorful, satisfying, and multitextured side dish will be front and center on my table.

RICE AND SAUSAGE CASSEROLE

Serves 8 to 10

Lundberg Organic Long-Grain White Rice is the test kitchen's favorite long-grain rice. To minimize the loss of liquid through evaporation, transfer the broth mixture to the rice as soon as it comes to a boil.

- 2 cups long-grain white rice
- 8 ounces bulk pork sausage
- 2 onions, chopped fine
- 1 large celery rib, minced
- Salt and pepper
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh sage
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 3 cups chicken broth
- ½ cup dry white wine
- ½ cup heavy cream
- ¼ cup chopped fresh parsley

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Spread rice in 13 by 9 inch baking dish.

2. Cook sausage in large saucepan over medium high heat until no longer pink, 4 to 6 minutes, breaking up meat with spoon. Add onions, celery, 1¼ teaspoons salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper and cook until vegetables are softened, 5 to 7 minutes, scraping up any browned bits. Add sage and garlic and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds.

3. Stir in broth, wine, and cream and bring to boil. Once boiling, immediately pour over rice in baking dish. Cover dish tightly with double layer of aluminum foil. Bake until rice is tender, 40 to 45 minutes. Remove from oven and let stand, covered, for 10 minutes. Fluff rice with fork and stir in parsley. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve.

Brussels Sprouts with Bacon

Roasted sprouts are satisfying on their own; savory bacon and sweet onion only make them better.

BY DIANE UNGER

MY GO-TO METHOD for roasting Brussels sprouts is to toss halved sprouts with olive oil, throw them on a baking sheet, and roast them cut side down at 475 degrees for about 15 minutes. The bottoms caramelize, the insides soften, and even sprout haters admit to enjoying them. But for the holidays, I pictured my roasted sprouts surrounded by crispy bacon and caramelized onions. I just needed to work out the details.

I tossed ¼ inch pieces of thick-cut bacon and a sliced onion with the halved sprouts, transferred the mix to a baking sheet, and put the sheet in the oven. At the 15-minute mark, the sprouts were tender, but the bacon was still flabby and the onion still crunchy. I let them continue to roast until the bacon and onion were where I wanted them to be, but by that point, my sprouts were way overcooked. Clearly, the bacon and onion had to have a jump start before I added the sprouts.

For my next test, I arranged the bacon pieces on one half of the sheet and then scattered the oil-coated onion over the other half. I slid the sheet into the oven for about 8 minutes, until the bacon was starting to brown, and then added the sprouts to the sheet. I stirred everything together, being careful to nestle the sprouts down onto the sheet to ensure contact. After 15 more minutes in the oven, the bacon was crispy, the onion was tender, and the sprouts were perfectly cooked—pleasantly brown and coated in flavorful bacon fat. A perfect holiday side dish.

ROASTED BRUSSELS SPROUTS WITH BACON AND ONION

Serves 4 to 6

Choose Brussels sprouts that are similar in size to ensure even cooking. To keep the sprouts' leaves intact, be sure to trim just a small amount from of the stem before halving the sprouts.

- 1½ pounds Brussels sprouts, trimmed and halved
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 onion, halved and sliced ¼ inch thick
- 8 slices thick-cut bacon, cut into ¼-inch pieces
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper

1. Adjust oven rack to lowest position and heat oven to 475 degrees. Spray rimmed baking sheet with vegetable oil spray. Toss sprouts and 1 tablespoon oil together in large bowl and set aside. Toss onion and remaining 1 tablespoon oil together in small bowl. Arrange onion in even layer on half of prepared sheet. Arrange bacon in even layer on other half of sheet. Cook until bacon begins to brown and onion begins to soften, 7 to 9 minutes.

2. Remove sheet from oven and transfer to wire rack. Add sprouts to sheet and stir to combine bacon, onion, and sprouts. Flip sprouts cut side down and nestle into sheet. Return sheet to oven and continue to cook until sprouts are deep golden brown and bacon is crispy, 15 to 17 minutes longer. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Transfer to platter and serve.

Apple Pandowdy

Say bye-bye to pie (for now) and howdy to Apple Pandowdy.

BY CECELIA JENKINS

ONE OF MANY old school New England desserts with funny names (slumps, grunts, etc.), an apple pandowdy is pie or biscuit dough casually laid atop a pan of apple filling and baked. It's similar to a skillet pie, but during baking, the crust is pressed or slashed into the filling so the juices flood over the top crust and caramelize in the oven. That's right, you purposefully mess up the top of your dessert, a process called "dowdying," which leaves a dowdy looking but eminently delicious result.

The inventor's name is lost to history, but way back in the colonial era (and even before), this counterintuitive process helped soften tough dough to make it easier to eat. The happy side effect was a dessert with layers of texture (some crisp, some soft) and an unexpected range of deep, sweet flavors.

These days, using modern kitchen equipment and more standardized ingredients, we can easily create delicate crusts, so softening the dough is no longer an urgent goal. But I did want that caramelized top—along with perfectly cooked apples and a thick, syrupy sauce to drizzle over a side of vanilla ice cream.

Existing recipes confused me. Some called for dowdying the dough before baking and others halfway through, while still others instructed you to wait until after baking. But reading through them made it clear that I'd have to nail down my filling first. I started with Granny Smith apples, which held their shape during baking but turned unpleasantly acidic once cooked. Golden Delicious apples, however, remained sweet and buttery and just firm enough. And while many old recipes called for molasses as a sweetener, I found it far too intense. Instead, I chose brown sugar (for gentler molasses flavor) and a bit of tart apple cider and lemon juice for balance. I knew I'd have to precook the apples briefly; doing so helps set their pectin, allowing them to hold their shape while concurrently softening as they cook. Done. I was back to the dough.

Placing a round of homemade all-butter dough (to which I added just a tablespoon of sour cream for tang) over the cooked apples and pressing it into the filling raw before baking it off was a disaster—I ended up with cardboard. Dowdying the crust after it was fully baked only made it soggy. So I tried dowdying halfway through baking. This was the ticket; it first allowed the crust time to set up and then gave the flooded juices time to caramelize. I was onto something.

But my excitement was short lived. Digging deeper, I found a mess of mushy apples. My dough, though dowdied, had resealed itself over the filling, leaving no escape for moisture and turning my filling into, essentially, applesauce. Simply slashing ventilation holes in the top wasn't enough either; there was still too much moisture.

For my next test I cut my dough into 2½ inch squares and arranged them in a rough overlapping pattern. When I opened the oven halfway through baking to do my dowdying, I felt a jolt of excitement. The partial coverage and overlapping squares of dough appeared to be promoting ventilation, allowing the apples to keep their shape and not overcook. Plus, this new setup gave the crust even more textural contrast: sticky caramelization, flaky pastry, and a few soft spots. The juices were still too thin, but a simple cornstarch slurry fixed that in my next round of testing, giving me a luxuriously syrupy sauce.

I'm always looking for shortcuts, so I decided to try the pandowdy using a store-bought pie crust. The results were totally disappointing, gummy and dull. A naturally denser product, store-bought crust turned gluey and didn't produce pandowdy's hallmark textures.

On my last day of testing, I scooped portions of pandowdy and served them with vanilla ice cream, drizzling a little extra syrup over top. I asked my tasters for feedback, but they were too busy licking their spoons to respond.

Sweet Golden Delicious apples create a flavorful syrup that goes beautifully with vanilla ice cream.

APPLE PANDOWDY Serves 6

Disturbing the crust, or "dowdying," allows juices from the filling to rise over the crust and caramelize as the dessert continues to bake. Removing the skillet from the oven allows you to properly press down on the crust. Do not use store-bought pie crust in this recipe, it yields gummy results.

PIE DOUGH

- **3 tablespoons ice water**
- **1 tablespoon sour cream**
- **⅔ cup (3⅓ ounces) all-purpose flour**
- **1 teaspoon granulated sugar**
- **½ teaspoon salt**
- **6 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into ¼-inch pieces and frozen for 15 minutes**

FILLING

- **2½ pounds Golden Delicious apples, peeled, cored, halved, and cut into ½-inch-thick wedges**
- **¼ cup packed (1¾ ounces) light brown sugar**
- **½ teaspoon ground cinnamon**
- **¼ teaspoon salt**
- **3 tablespoons unsalted butter**
- **¾ cup apple cider**
- **1 tablespoon cornstarch**
- **2 teaspoons lemon juice**

TOPPING

- **1 tablespoon granulated sugar**
- **¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon**
- **1 large egg, lightly beaten**

Vanilla ice cream

1. FOR THE PIE DOUGH: Combine ice water and sour cream in bowl. Process flour, sugar, and salt in food processor until combined, about 3 seconds. Add butter and pulse until size of large peas, 6 to 8 pulses. Add sour cream mixture and pulse until dough forms large clumps and no dry flour remains, 3 to 6 pulses, scraping down sides of bowl as needed.

2. Form dough into 4 inch disk, wrap tightly in plastic wrap, and refrigerate for 1 hour. (Wrapped dough can be refrigerated for up to 2 days or frozen for up to 1 month. If frozen, let dough thaw completely on counter before rolling.)

3. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 400 degrees. Let chilled dough sit on counter to soften slightly, about 5 minutes, before rolling. Roll dough into 10-inch circle on lightly floured counter. Using pizza cutter, cut dough into four 2½-inch wide strips, then make four 2½-inch wide perpendicular cuts to form squares. (Pieces around edges of dough will be smaller.) Transfer dough pieces to parchment paper–lined baking sheet, cover with plastic, and refrigerate until firm, at least 30 minutes.

4. FOR THE FILLING: Toss apples, sugar, cinnamon, and salt together in large bowl. Melt butter in 10-inch skillet over medium heat. Add apple mixture, cover, and cook until apples become slightly pliable and release their juice, about 10 minutes, stirring occasionally.

5. Whisk cider, cornstarch, and lemon juice in bowl until no lumps remain, add to skillet. Bring to simmer and cook, uncovered, stirring occasionally, until sauce is thickened, about 2 minutes. Off heat, press lightly on apples to form even layer.

6. FOR THE TOPPING: Combine sugar and cinnamon in small bowl. Working quickly, shingle dough pieces over filling until mostly covered, overlapping as needed. Brush dough pieces with egg and sprinkle with cinnamon sugar.

7. Bake until crust is slightly puffed and beginning to brown, about 15 minutes. Remove skillet from oven. Using back of large spoon, press down in center of crust until juices come up over top of crust. Repeat four more times around skillet. Make sure all apples are submerged and return skillet to oven. Continue to bake until crust is golden brown, about 15 minutes longer.

8. Transfer skillet to wire rack and let cool for at least 20 minutes. Serve with ice cream, drizzling extra sauce over top.

TEST KITCHEN TECHNIQUE Assembling Apple Pandowdy

ROLL AND CUT
Using pizza cutter, cut dough into 4 strips, then make 4 perpendicular cuts. Transfer pieces to parchment-lined baking sheet, cover with plastic, and refrigerate for 30 minutes.

SHINGLE PIECES
Working quickly, shingle dough pieces evenly over cooked filling until mostly covered, overlapping pieces as needed. (Arrangement doesn't need to be perfect.)

BRUSH WITH EGG
Using pastry brush, coat dough pieces with lightly beaten egg and then sprinkle with cinnamon sugar.

"Dowdy" is a verb meaning to gently press the crust into the filling with the back of a spoon. It sounds messy, but this step brings juices up over the crust to caramelize in the oven.

SCIENCE Preventing Mushy Apples

When raw apples are baked into a dessert like pandowdy, they often turn overly soft and applesauce-like. The solution to the problem sounds counterintuitive, but precooking the apples actually helps them hold their shape once they are baked. Here's how it works: When apples are gently heated, their pectin is converted to a heat-stable form that helps the apples stay intact and hold their shape as they soften further in the oven.

The American Table
Sugar, Sugar

It was right after World War II, and America needed a dose of sugar—with Dinah Shore, they got it. Her inescapable "Shoo-Fly Pie and Apple Pan Dowdy" was a Top 10 hit in 1946, inspiring covers from Guy Lombardo and Ella Fitzgerald. Shore was hardly alone in singing about food: Eileen Barton crooned "If I Knew You Were Comin' I'd've Baked a Cake," and Doris Day served up "Tacos, Enchiladas and Beans."

Photo (bottom): Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images

Shore's hit presaged more than just decades of musical success—she became a celebrated cook, too. Dinner at Shore's Beverly Hills home was among the most coveted invitations in town, inspiring celebrity cooking segments with Frank Sinatra and Ann-Margret on her 1970s talk show, "Dinah's Place," and three best-selling cookbooks—including, naturally, *Someone's in the Kitchen with Dinah* (1971).

Rum Pumpkin Chiffon Pie

Pumpkin pie is great. But this year, we were in the mood for something exceptional.

BY KATIE LEAIRD

PUMPKIN CHIFFON PIE—A lighter, more elegant, and (as we found out) incredibly delicious version of the old Thanksgiving standard—consists of a gelatin-stabilized pumpkin custard lightened by meringue and sometimes whipped cream. The result is a fluffy, mousse-like, flavor-packed pie that, in my opinion, makes an elegant finale to a heavy Thanksgiving feast. The healthy glug of rum makes it an even happier holiday closer.

I know. I just used a big list of red flag chef words: "chiffon," "gelatin stabilized," "custard," "meringue." But my real operative word for this pie was "ease." I set out to dial this dessert back from scary to simple and create an accessible but still showstopping pie that my relatives would ask for year after year.

After studying various existing recipes (see "Fashions in Food"), I learned that the first step in most pumpkin chiffon pie recipes is to separate the eggs. You gently cook the yolks with sugar and pumpkin puree to make a custard base, taking care not to scramble the eggs. Then you mix in melted gelatin for extra stability. After chilling the warm mixture, you can finally fold in whipped egg whites and whipped cream. I tried this routine a few times in the test kitchen and found my head spinning as I tried to juggle the pies' various heating, cooling, whipping, and folding needs.

I began to question whether cooking a custard base was really necessary. Pumpkin puree has plenty of body and flavor, so maybe I didn't need to go to the trouble. I simply microwaved the pumpkin puree before combining it with cream, brown sugar, cinnamon, and salt and stirring in warmed gelatin and rum—without the egg yolks, there was no need to heat the mixture further. True, the pumpkin mixture was slightly fibrous, but pureeing the filling in the food processor took care of that, leaving it silky smooth. Next up, an airy meringue to fold into it.

There's a limit to how much air egg whites can hold. Once that line is crossed, the resulting meringue will become dry and deflate. But for this recipe, I wanted my egg whites to hold as much air as possible. To make this goal easier to achieve, I added sugar, which dissolves in the egg white, forming a more stable film surrounding the air bubbles, halfway through whipping. Once my mixture tripled in volume, transformed from transparent to opaque white, and held its shape, I carefully folded it into my pumpkin base. I transferred this mixture to a prebaked graham cracker crust and placed the pie in the refrigerator, where it would chill and set—the whole thing was done without any time on the stovetop.

A few hours later, the filling had shed its jiggle and was cleanly sliceable. A layer of whipped cream spread over the domed pie intensified its dramatic look, and a handful of crumbled gingersnap cookies sprinkled over the top gave it some playful decoration and a bit of contrasting crunch.

Removing the custard-making step made this a pretty simple dessert, one that delivered outsize flavors and left my tasters humming happy songs for the rest of the day.

Eliminating the egg yolks from the filling streamlines the cooking process, and a quick spin in a food processor makes the filling as smooth as silk.

One Pie, Two Cookies

We love the flavor combination of gingersnap cookies and pumpkin, but we found that a crust made with crushed gingersnaps overpowered the delicate filling. Instead, we make a traditional graham cracker crust and garnish the pie with crumbled gingersnaps.

RUM PUMPKIN CHIFFON PIE

Serves 8 to 10

If you prefer to use pasteurized egg whites in the filling, use ½ cup and increase the whipping time in step 4 to 5 to 6 minutes. For a well-mounded pie, be sure to fully whip the egg whites to glossy, stiff peaks in step 4. Plan ahead: This pie needs to be chilled for at least 4 hours before serving.

CRUST
- **9 whole graham crackers, broken into 1-inch pieces**
- **3 tablespoons granulated sugar**
- **½ teaspoon ground ginger**
- **5 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted**

FILLING
- **1 tablespoon unflavored gelatin**
- **¼ cup dark rum**
- **1 (15-ounce) can unsweetened pumpkin puree**
- **½ cup packed (2⅛ ounces) dark brown sugar**
- **1 teaspoon ground cinnamon**
- **¾ teaspoon salt**
- **½ cup heavy cream**
- **4 large egg whites**
- **½ cup (2½ ounces) granulated sugar**

TOPPING
- **1 cup heavy cream, chilled**
- **1 tablespoon granulated sugar**
- **½ teaspoon vanilla extract**
- **4 gingersnap cookies, crushed into ¼-inch pieces**

Club members show off winning bouquets after a flower show

The American Table
Fashions in Food

One of the earliest recipes for pumpkin chiffon pie appears in *Fashions in Food*, a cookbook published in 1929 by the Beverly Hills Women's Club. In the book's foreword, Roy Rogers declared that "When you have helped to raise the standard of cooking, you have helped to raise the only thing in the world that really matters anyhow." With recipes like A Palatable Dish (a casserole of beef, potato, and tomato), Dependable Digestible Dumplings, and Bestest Cake, the cookbook surely did just that.

–REBECCA HAYS

1. FOR THE CRUST: Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 325 degrees. Process graham cracker pieces, sugar, and ginger in food processor until finely ground, about 30 seconds. Add melted butter and pulse until combined, about 8 pulses. Transfer crumbs to 9-inch pie plate. Using bottom of dry measuring cup, press crumbs into bottom and up sides of plate. Bake until crust is fragrant and beginning to brown, 14 to 16 minutes. Let crust cool completely on wire rack, about 30 minutes.

2. FOR THE FILLING: Sprinkle gelatin over rum in large bowl and let sit until gelatin softens, about 5 minutes. Microwave until mixture is bubbling around edges and gelatin dissolves, about 30 seconds. Let cool until slightly warm, about 110 degrees. (It will be syrupy.)

3. Meanwhile, microwave pumpkin until heated to 110 degrees, 30 to 60 seconds. Process pumpkin, brown sugar, cinnamon, and salt in food processor until completely smooth, about 1 minute. Scrape down sides of bowl and process until no streaks remain, 10 to 15 seconds. Transfer pumpkin mixture to bowl with gelatin mixture and stir to combine. Stir in cream.

4. Using stand mixer fitted with whisk, whip egg whites on medium-low speed until foamy, about 1 minute. Increase speed to medium-high and whip whites to soft, billowy mounds, about 1 minute. Gradually add granulated sugar and whip until glossy, stiff peaks form, 2 to 3 minutes. Whisk one-third of meringue into pumpkin mixture until smooth. Using rubber spatula, fold remaining meringue into pumpkin mixture until only few white streaks remain.

5. Spoon filling into center of cooled crust. Gently spread filling to edges of crust, leaving mounded dome in center. Refrigerate pie for at least 4 hours or up to 24 hours.

6. FOR THE TOPPING: Using stand mixer fitted with whisk, whip cream, sugar, and vanilla on medium-low speed until foamy, about 1 minute. Increase speed to high and whip until soft peaks form, 1 to 3 minutes. Spread whipped cream evenly over pie, following domed contours. Sprinkle gingersnap pieces over top. Serve.

What's the Best Canned Pumpkin?

Americans rely on canned pumpkin to add a subtle sweetness and bright orange color to pumpkin pie and pumpkin bread. But does it really matter which canned pumpkin you choose? To find out, we picked three widely available products and had 21 test kitchen staffers sample each plain, baked into pumpkin cake, and whipped into our no-bake Rum Pumpkin Chiffon Pie. In the plain tasting, tasters noted the differences in color: Two samples were orange, as expected, but one was pale yellow. Tasters also noted textural differences. The yellow puree was pulpy and made an oddly thick pie filling and an overly dense cake. Another product was prominently fibrous and turned out a gritty pie. We preferred the smoothness of the less-fibrous pumpkin, which made tender cakes and a smooth pie filling.

Tasters described the flavor of the two lower-ranked purees as metallic and bitter, while the top-rated product was deemed pleasantly sweet. Here, sugar was the culprit. While the lower-ranked options contained 14 grams of sugar per can, our top-ranked pumpkin had 17.5 grams of sugar per can and was lightly sweet, with minimal bitterness. Clearly, some products were relying on pumpkins with more natural sugar. In fact, every product had just one ingredient: pumpkin. So what accounted for the color, texture, and flavor differences?

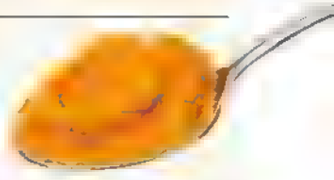
As it turns out, the U.S. Department of Agriculture doesn't have strict guidelines for what can be labeled as pumpkin. Since botanists define pumpkin as any squash with a firm shell, round body, and golden flesh, there are many pumpkins from which to choose. We reached out to manufacturers and learned that our top-ranked product uses Dickinson pumpkins cultivated in Illinois, while the poorest-performing product is made from Golden Delicious pumpkins harvested in Oregon. And though our runner-up is also made from Dickinson pumpkins, each brand uses a proprietary variety unique to its product.

Our favorite was Libby's 100% Pure Pumpkin, which tasters praised for its silky consistency and subtle sweetness that makes moist, rich cakes and fluffy, delicate pies. Fortunately, it's also the easiest to find. Libby's makes 85 percent of the world's canned pumpkin. –JASON ALVAREZ

RECOMMENDED

LIBBY'S 100% Pure Pumpkin
Price: $2.55 for 15 oz ($0.17 per oz)
Sugar: 17.5 g
Fiber: 10.5 g
Pumpkin Variety: Dickinson

Tasters praised our top pick, which is made from pumpkins grown in Illinois, for its "smooth" consistency, "slightly sweet" notes, and "prominent pumpkin flavor." This puree made pies and cakes that tasted the "most classic" of the bunch, and tasters loved its "bright orange color" and "subtle" squashiness.

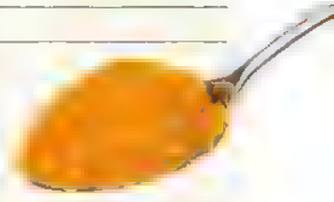


SMOOTH, SWEET, AND "PUMPKINY"

RECOMMENDED WITH RESERVATIONS

ONE-PIE Pumpkin
Price: $2.20 for 15 oz ($0.15 per oz)
Sugar: 14 g
Fiber: 14 g
Pumpkin Variety: Dickinson

Most tasters thought this New England–based product's "muted pumpkin" notes "balanced" well with other ingredients. The cake made with this puree was perfectly "tender," but tasters noticed a slightly "gritty" texture in the pie. A few tasters also picked up on a "metallic" off-flavor.



TEXTURE AND FLAVOR A LITTLE OFF

NOT RECOMMENDED

FARMER'S MARKET Organic Pumpkin
Price: $3.10 for 15 oz ($0.21 per oz)
Sugar: 14 g
Fiber: 14 g
Pumpkin Variety: Golden Delicious

This product's "unappealing," alarmingly pale color was an immediate no-go for tasters, who noted that its "squashy" color "looked nothing like pumpkin." It didn't taste much better either. Tasters complained of "bitter," "starchy," and "vegetal" notes and a "foamy," "chalky" texture.

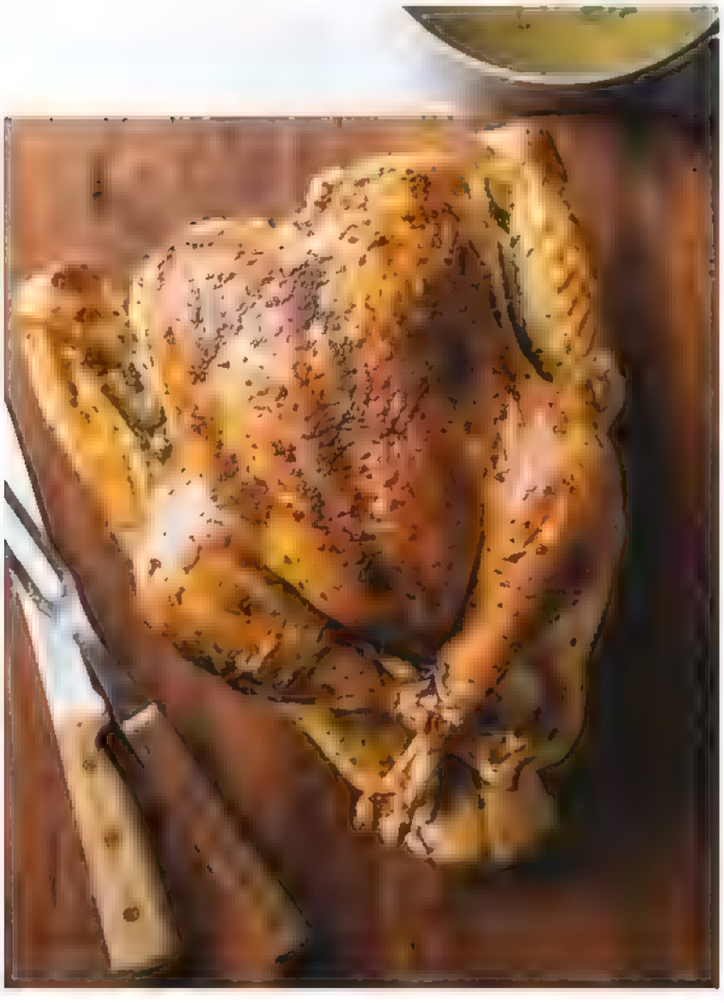
BITTER, STARCHY, AND CHALKY

Sugar and fiber amounts are per 15-ounce can.

Photo Courtesy of the Beverly Hills Women's Club

Cooking Class Easy Herb-Roasted Turkey with Gravy

We give you all the tools you need to make a moist, juicy herb-rubbed turkey and a rich gravy from start to finish. Our motto? Slow and steady wins the race. BY CHRISTIE MORRISON



EASY HERB-ROASTED TURKEY WITH GRAVY

Serves 10 to 12

We recommend using a self-basting turkey for this recipe (Butterball makes our favorite self-basting bird). Butterballs are "prebrined," meaning that they're injected with a salt solution that helps them stay moist.

TURKEY

- **2 onions, chopped**
- **1 carrot, peeled and chopped**
- **1 celery rib, chopped**
- **4 cups chicken broth**
- **1 cup dry white wine**
- **5 fresh sage leaves, plus 1 tablespoon minced**
- **1 sprig fresh rosemary, plus 1 tablespoon minced**
- **1 sprig fresh thyme, plus 1 tablespoon minced**
- **8 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened**
- **4 garlic cloves, minced**
- **1 tablespoon grated lemon zest**
- **1 teaspoon salt**
- **1 teaspoon pepper**
- **1 (12- to 14-pound) prebrined turkey, neck and giblets discarded**

GRAVY

- **4 tablespoons unsalted butter**
- **⅓ cup all-purpose flour**
- **2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley**
- **Salt and pepper**

1. FOR THE TURKEY: Adjust oven rack to lowest position and heat oven to 325 degrees. Scatter onions, carrot, and celery in bottom of large roasting pan; add broth, wine, sage leaves, rosemary sprig, and thyme sprig to pan. Set V rack over vegetables in roasting pan.

2. Combine butter, garlic, lemon zest, salt, pepper, minced sage, minced rosemary, and minced thyme in bowl and mix until smooth. Pat turkey dry inside and out with paper towels. Using your fingers, gently loosen skin covering breasts and leg quarters, being careful not to tear skin. Spoon half of butter mixture under skin, directly on meat. Using your hands, rub remaining butter mixture over outside of turkey. Tuck wings behind back and tie legs together with kitchen twine.

3. Transfer turkey, breast side up, to V rack. Roast until breast registers 160 degrees and thighs register 175 degrees, 2½ to 3 hours. Transfer turkey to cutting board and let rest for 30 minutes.

4. FOR THE GRAVY: Meanwhile, carefully strain contents of pan through fine-mesh strainer into fat separator; discard solids and let liquid settle for at least 5 minutes.

5. Melt butter in medium saucepan over medium heat. Add flour and whisk constantly until honey colored, about 2 minutes. Gradually whisk in 4 cups defatted pan juices (if necessary, add enough water to equal 4 cups) and bring to boil. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer, stirring occasionally, until thickened, about 5 minutes. Off heat, stir in parsley and season with salt and pepper to taste. Carve turkey and serve with herb gravy.

STEP BY STEP **Easy Herb-Roasted Turkey with Gravy**

1. BUILD GRAVY BASE
Scatter the onions, carrot, and celery in a large roasting pan. Add the broth, wine, and herbs.
WHY? The aromatic vegetables and herbs infuse the pan drippings with deep, complex flavor while broth and wine form the base of the gravy.

2. MAKE HERB BUTTER
Combine the butter, garlic, lemon zest, salt, pepper, and minced herbs in a bowl and mix until smooth.
WHY? This herbaceous and citrusy compound butter adds bright, fresh flavor to the bird.

3. SEASON UNDER SKIN
Using your fingers, gently loosen the skin covering the breasts and leg quarters without tearing it. Spoon half the butter mixture under the skin, onto the meat.
WHY? The salty butter mixture seasons the meat and helps keep it moist during cooking.

4. SEASON EXTERIOR
Using your hands, rub the remaining butter mixture over the outside of the turkey.
WHY? The fat in the butter helps crisp the skin while the sugars in the milk solids aid in browning.

5. TUCK AND TIE
Tuck the wings behind the back of the bird and tie the legs together with kitchen twine.
WHY? Tucking the wings keeps them from burning. Tying the legs makes the bird easier to maneuver and makes for an attractive presentation.

TEST KITCHEN TIPS FOR ANY ROASTED TURKEY

Shopping and Thawing

A Note About Size

We typically recommend roasting a 12- to 14-pound bird. Larger birds can be difficult to locate except at Thanksgiving; plus, they're hard to handle and to fit in a roasting pan.

KOSHER

Kosher birds are salted to help draw blood from the bird. This seasons the meat, improves its texture, and keeps it moist.

FRESH VERSUS FROZEN

Most store-bought "fresh" turkeys have previously been frozen. We recommend buying a frozen turkey, since the freezing process results in a more consistent, moist texture than store-bought "fresh" turkeys have.

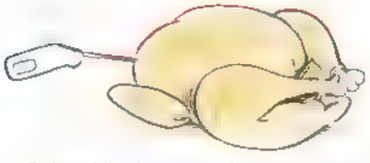
ORGANIC AND HERITAGE

These birds taste great, but they require brining or salting to keep them from drying out during cooking.

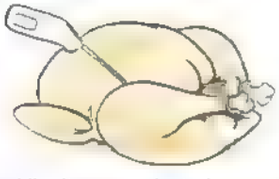
Thawing a Frozen Turkey

To defrost a turkey in the refrigerator, plan on one day of defrosting for every 4 pounds. If it won't fit in the fridge, use a big cooler and ice packs (changing the ice packs as needed to keep things cool). For quicker thawing, fill a large bucket with cold water. Place the turkey, still in its original wrapper, in the bucket for 6 to 8 hours for a 12-pound bird (30 minutes per pound). Change the water every half-hour to guard against bacteria. Refrigerate the thawed bird until you are ready to roast.

TEST KITCHEN TECHNIQUE Taking the Temperature of a Turkey



1. Insert the thermometer in the neck end, holding it parallel to the bird. The breast should reach 160 degrees. Confirm the temperature in both sides of the bird.

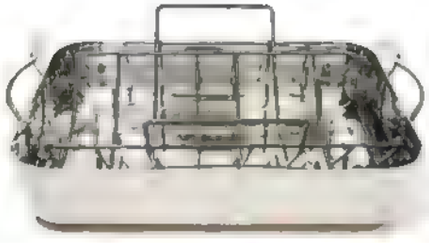


2 Insert the thermometer between the breast and drumstick and into the thickest part of the thigh, staying away from the bone. The thigh should reach 175 degrees. Confirm the temperature in the other thigh.

Good to Know

ESSENTIAL EQUIPMENT For Roasting Whole Poultry

For successful turkey roasting, make sure you're armed with the right equipment.



ROASTING PAN

The **Calphalon Contemporary Stainless Roasting Pan with Rack ($99.99)** is big enough to accommodate a turkey and has roomy, secure handles to facilitate lifting.

FAT SEPARATOR

With its long, comfortable handle and a wide, tall-sided strainer that contains splashes and is easy to pour into, the **Cuisipro Fat Separator ($33.95)** consistently produces fat-free pan drippings.

KITCHEN TWINE

We like **Librett Cotton Butcher's Twine ($8.29).** This 100 percent cotton twine conveniently releases string from the ball's center and ties and holds foods without burning, fraying, or breaking.

THERMOMETER

The **ThermoWorks Thermapen Mk4 ($99.00)** registers quickly, which is important when you are opening the oven to check the bird.

Getting the Roux Right

A roux is a cooked mixture of flour and fat that thickens and adds flavor to gravy. The darker the roux, the more pronounced its flavor will be. Here we use a light roux to let the flavor of the turkey shine. Cook the roux, whisking it constantly, until it is the color of honey.

Cooking for a crowd? We've got you covered. Go to **CooksCountry.com/guide** for our Thanksgiving Survival Guide.

6. ELEVATE BIRD

Transfer the turkey to a V-rack set inside the roasting pan.

WHY? Elevating the turkey allows air to circulate around it, resulting in more even cooking.

7. USE LOWER HEAT

Roast the turkey at 325 degrees for 2½ to 3 hours.

WHY? A relatively low oven temperature helps the white and dark meat cook more evenly and allows the skin to brown without scorching.

8. LET IT REST

Transfer the turkey to a cutting board and let it rest for 30 minutes.

WHY? Resting allows the juices to redistribute throughout the turkey, keeping it moist.

9. STRAIN PAN JUICES

Strain the contents of the roasting pan through a fine-mesh strainer into a fat separator.

WHY? Straining and defatting removes the spent vegetables and excess fat from the gravy.

10. THICKEN THEM

Gradually whisk the defatted pan juices into a roux.

WHY? The roux will thicken and enrich the pan juices into a flavorful gravy that clings lightly to the turkey.

Illustration: Ross MacDonald

One-Pan Dinner Pork Loin Roast with Barley, Squash, and Swiss Chard

Most meats cooked *en cocotte* fly solo. Not this time.

BY CHRISTIE MORRISON

PORC EN COCOTTE may sound highbrow, but it couldn't be simpler. Brown a pork roast in a Dutch oven (the cocotte) and then cover the pot tightly and bake it in a low oven. Adding vegetables and barley makes it a complete one-pot dinner.

The low heat, trapped moisture method guards against overcooking the pork. Meanwhile, the barley and vegetables could cook in the liquid. Neither long-cooking hulled barley nor instant barley fit the timeline, but pearl (or pearled) barley—hulled barley with the outer coating polished off—cooks in the right time frame.

After rinsing a cup of barley (otherwise its dusty surface might burn), I browned the pork in my Dutch oven. Then, following the method we use for rice pilaf, I cooked the barley with some chopped onion in the fat left in the pot, allowing it to toast a bit. Some garlic, fresh thyme, and a glug of white wine added a heady aroma to the mix. I stirred in 4 cups of chicken broth and nestled the pork on top.

I slipped the covered pot into the oven for about 40 minutes, at which point the pork hit 135 degrees (it would increase to serving temperature, 140 degrees, as it rested on a carving board). The barley wasn't quite tender, but I had time to finish the barley on the stovetop. I stirred in cubed butternut squash and chopped Swiss chard to cook just until tender and brilliantly colored.

A bit of Parmesan cheese was the final touch. The result was chewy and stick-to-your-ribs satisfying—the perfect complement to rosy slices of tender pork.

INGREDIENT SPOTLIGHT Barley

Pearl barley cooking times vary depending on the type. That's because the pearling process can yield coarse, medium, or fine barley depending on the amount of abrasion used on the grain. Most brands of pearl barley don't disclose their degree of pearling, but you can get an idea by looking closely: Pearl barley that is beige with slightly pointed ends takes the longest to cook; the whiter and rounder the grain, the more polished the exterior and the shorter the cooking time.

PORK LOIN ROAST WITH BARLEY, BUTTERNUT SQUASH, AND SWISS CHARD Serves 4 to 6

Arrowhead Mills and Quaker pearl barley yield the most consistent results in this recipe. If you use a different brand, you may need to extend the cooking time in step 5, adding water as necessary. Use a large Dutch oven with a tight-fitting lid. Look for a 3-pound pork loin roast that is 7 to 8 inches long and 4 to 5 inches wide.

- 1 (3-pound) boneless pork loin roast
- Salt and pepper
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh thyme
- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 cup pearl barley, rinsed
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- ¼ cup dry white wine
- 4 cups chicken broth
- ½ small butternut squash, peeled, seeded, and cut into ½-inch pieces (2½ cups)
- 8 ounces Swiss chard, stems chopped, leaves cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1 ounce Parmesan cheese, grated (½ cup)
- 2 teaspoons cider vinegar

1. Adjust oven rack to lowest position and heat oven to 250 degrees. Trim pork, leaving ¼ inch thick layer of fat on top. Pat pork dry with paper towels, then tie with kitchen twine at 1 inch intervals. Season pork with salt and pepper and sprinkle with 1 tablespoon thyme. Heat 2 tablespoons oil in Dutch oven over medium-high heat until just smoking. Brown pork on all sides, 7 to 10 minutes, reducing heat if pot begins to scorch. Transfer pork to plate.

2. Reduce heat to medium and add remaining 1 tablespoon oil, onion, barley, and ¼ teaspoon salt to now-empty pot. Cook until onion is softened, about 5 minutes. Stir in garlic and remaining 1 tablespoon thyme and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Stir in wine, scraping up any browned bits, and cook until evaporated, about 30 seconds. Stir in broth and bring to simmer.

3. Off heat, return browned pork and any accumulated juices to pot. Place large sheet of aluminum foil over pot and press to seal, then cover tightly with lid. Transfer pot to oven and cook until center of pork registers 135 degrees, 25 to 35 minutes.

4. Remove pot from oven. Transfer pork to carving board, tent with foil, and let rest while barley and vegetables finish cooking.

5. Meanwhile, transfer pot to stovetop and simmer over medium-low heat, covered, until barley is just cooked through but still somewhat firm in center, 10 to 15 minutes. Stir in squash and chard stems and cook, covered, until vegetables are tender, 10 to 15 minutes. Stir in chard leaves, increase heat to medium, and cook, uncovered, until leaves are tender and mixture is thickened to risotto-like consistency, 2 to 5 minutes. Off heat, stir in Parmesan and vinegar. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

6. Discard twine and slice pork. Serve with barley and vegetables.

The barley is not fully cooked when the pot comes out of the oven, but it has time to cook through on the stovetop once we add the squash and chard.

Cooking Pork, Barley, and Vegetables in Just One Pot

START ON STOVETOP
Brown pork in oil, then set pork aside. Add oil, onion, and barley and sauté until onion softens. Add garlic and thyme.

ADD PORK
Stir in wine and chicken broth, then return browned pork and any accumulated juices to barley mixture.

TRANSFER TO OVEN
Cover pot tightly with sheet of aluminum foil and lid and transfer pot to oven. Cook until pork registers 135 degrees.

FINISH ON STOVETOP
Remove pork. Simmer barley, covered, until somewhat firm before adding squash and chard.

Cooking for Two Grilled Cheese with Tomato Soup

Grilled cheese is a snap, but soup? Believe it: Ours is so easy and so much better than opening a can.

BY CECELIA JENKINS

GRILLED CHEESE AND tomato soup are a classic combination, but too often, people reach for the familiar red can. Store bought has its charms, but I wanted a simple homemade tomato soup for two to pair with a couple of golden brown, crispy, creamy grilled cheese sandwiches. I wanted it to happen fast and to make just enough soup, not an overwhelming vat.

I started the soup in a saucepan, sweating onions and garlic with a bay leaf and a pinch of red pepper flakes I opened a can of whole peeled toma toes (we prefer them to other canned tomato products for their deeper tomato flavor) and added them along with chicken broth and a pinch of sugar to balance the tomatoes' acidity. I poured the warm mixture into the blender to puree. It was flavorful, but it was also watery.

Many tomato soup recipes call for fin ishing the blended soup with cream to create a silky texture. But cream muted the tomatoes' brightness I turned to a traditional Spanish technique for gaz pacho, adding half a piece of torn white sandwich bread to the pot; once the bread was saturated, I blended it into the soup. The bread lent body without compromising the tomato flavor. My soup was done in 15 minutes

After assembling the sandwiches with plenty of American cheese, I brushed melted butter on top (this provided easier and better coverage than spread ing soft butter with a knife). I placed my sandwiches in a conventional skillet, turned the heat to low (to prevent burning and allow time to melt the cheese), and waited. And waited. After more than 10 minutes, the bread had barely browned. Clearly I needed a hotter pan and more enveloping heat

Preheating the pan and covering the skillet with a lid helped, but low heat still took too long. I jumped to medium low heat, waiting until the bread on the bottom was golden brown before flipping the sandwiches over to finish. This time, the sandwiches were brown on the bottom in 4 to 8 minutes

I dunked my sandwich into my soup and gobbled down the most comfort ing meal of the week. Next time I consider reaching for the can, I'll kick it down the road instead

Illustration Lauren Pettapiece

GRILLED CHEESE WITH TOMATO SOUP FOR TWO

For this rec'pe, we prefer the creamy texture and smooth melting ability of American cheese, but you can substitute cheddar or Gruyère cheese, if desired Our favorite s'ced deli American cheese is Boar's Head American Cheese. Because we don't recommend preheating an empty nonstick skillet, we ca for a conventiona skillet here

- 4½ slices hearty white sandwich bread
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter, plus 2 tablespoons melted
- ¾ cup chopped onion
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 bay leaf
- Salt and pepper
- Pinch red pepper flakes (optional)
- 1 (14.5-ounce) can whole peeled tomatoes
- 1 cup chicken broth
- 1½ teaspoons packed light brown sugar
- 4 slices deli American cheese (4 ounces)
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh chives

1. Tear ½ slice bread into 1 inch pieces; set aside. Melt 1 tablespoon butter in medium saucepan over medium low heat. Add onion, garlic, bay leaf, ¼ teaspoon salt, and pepper flakes, if using. Cover and cook until onion is softened, 3 to 5 minutes, stirring occasionally.

2. Add tomatoes and their juice, broth, sugar, and bread pieces to saucepan, breaking up tomatoes with wooden spoon. Cook, uncovered, until bread pieces break down, about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove from heat, discard bay leaf.

3A. FOR A BLENDER: Transfer soup to blender jar and process until smooth and creamy, about 2 minutes. Return soup to saucepan and season with salt and pepper to taste.

3B. FOR AN IMMERSION BLENDER: Place blender directly in saucepan so blades are submerged (you may need to tilt saucepan slightly) and blend until smooth and creamy, about 3 minutes, scraping down sides of saucepan as needed. Season with salt and pepper to taste

It's hard to beat easy-melting American cheese, but this sandwich is great with cheddar or Gruyère, too.

TWO KEYS

Perfecting Soup and Sandwich

For golden sandwiches with evenly melted cheese, preheat the skillet over medium-low heat before slowly toasting the sandwiches For a velvety soup that retains its bright flavor, we give it body not with cream but with half a piece of torn bread

4. Using remaining 4 slices bread, make 2 sandwiches with 2 cheese slices each. Preheat 12 inch skil let over medium low heat for 3 min utes. Brush 1 side of sandwiches with half of melted butter. Place sandwiches buttered side down in skillet. Brush tops of sandwiches with remaining melted butter. Cover and cook until sandwich bottoms are golden brown, 4 to 8 minutes, moving sandwiches as needed for even browning

5. Using metal spatula, flip sand wiches and continue to cook, covered, until golden brown on second side and cheese is melted, about 3 minutes.

6. Bring soup to simmer over medium heat. Ladle into bowls, sprinkle with chives, and serve with sandwiches.

The American Table
Dynamic Duo

This soup and sandwich have been linked since the 1940s, when they were paired as a school cafeteria lunch. At the time teachers were often charged with preparing lunch for their students, and canned tomato soup was recommended by the government as an easy way to provide children with a dose of vitamin C And, in the words of a 1960 Campbell's ad, tomato soup and a sandwich is a "wholesome, nourishing 4-minute meal."

–REBECCA HAYS

Five Easy Granolas

Life's too short for dry, dusty, flavorless supermarket granola. BY ASHLEY MOORE

WE ALL KNOW those promising looking boxes of granola that line the shelves in the grocery store, pasted with pictures of chunky golden brown clusters, crunchy nuts, and bits of tender dried fruit. But when you bring them home and reach into the box, too often you come up with a sad mixture of pale oats, dried out nuts, and a few raisins at the bottom of the bag. I knew I could create a recipe for better granola. But could I create an easy recipe? How about five? I set off to find out.

I started out with a company recipe (Almond Granola with Dried Fruit, *Cook's Illustrated*, April/May 2012) that calls for whisking together maple syrup, brown sugar, vanilla extract, salt, and vegetable oil. I tossed old fashioned rolled oats and chopped almonds into the sticky mixture before spreading and packing it into a rimmed baking sheet and taking it to the oven. After 40 to 45 minutes, the granola baked into a solid mass. Once I let the granola cool to room temperature, I was able to easily break it into smaller pieces and add the dried fruit—in this case raisins—which I chopped to help them evenly distribute throughout the mixture.

It's an excellent recipe, but granola is a very personal experience and I prefer slightly lighter oats, so I shortened the cooking time to 35 to 40 minutes. Everything else I kept the same. The next order of business was to decide on a few different variations with easy, flavorful add ins. For apricot orange granola, I packed the mixture with pepitas, dried apricots, and orange zest. In a second variation, I left the almonds in for crunch and added crowd pleasing mini chocolate chips and chopped dried cherries. For another, I substituted some honey for the sugar and buttery pecans for the almonds, plus, I added ground cinnamon with the honey mixture. My final variation, salted caramel and peanut, meant swapping in caramel for the brown sugar and subbing peanuts for the almonds.

We mastered a recipe for Almond-Raisin Granola (above) before developing variations that include other dried fruits and nuts, chocolate chips, honey, caramel sauce, or orange zest.

ALMOND-RAISIN GRANOLA

Makes about 9 cups

Do not use quick oats here. We prefer to chop the almonds by hand for even texture and superior crunch. (A food processor will chop whole nuts unevenly.) You can substitute an equal amount of slivered or sliced almonds, if desired.

- ½ cup vegetable oil
- ½ cup maple syrup
- ½ cup packed (2½ ounces) light brown sugar
- 4 teaspoons vanilla extract
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 5 cups (15 ounces) old-fashioned rolled oats
- 2 cups (10 ounces) raw almonds, chopped coarse
- 2 cups (10 ounces) raisins, chopped

1. Adjust oven rack to upper middle position and heat oven to 325 degrees. Line rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper. Spray parchment with vegetable oil spray.
2. Whisk oil, maple syrup, sugar, vanilla, and salt together in large bowl. Fold in oats and almonds until thoroughly combined.
3. Transfer oat mixture to prepared sheet and spread across entire surface of sheet in even layer. Using stiff metal spatula, press down firmly on oat mixture until very compact. Bake until lightly browned, 35 to 40 minutes, rotating sheet halfway through baking.
4. Transfer sheet to wire rack and let granola cool completely, about 1 hour. Break cooled granola into pieces of desired size. Stir in raisins and serve. (Granola can be stored in airtight container for up to 2 weeks.)

APRICOT-ORANGE GRANOLA

Substitute 1 cup raw pepitas, chopped coarse, for almonds and dried apricots for raisins. Add 1 tablespoon grated orange zest to oat mixture in step 2.

CHERRY–CHOCOLATE CHIP GRANOLA

Substitute dried cherries for raisins. Add 1 cup mini semisweet chocolate chips to mixture with dried cherries in step 4.

HONEY-PECAN GRANOLA

Substitute honey for sugar and pecans for almonds. Add 1 tablespoon ground cinnamon to oil mixture in step 2.

SALTED CARAMEL–PEANUT GRANOLA

Omit raisins. Increase salt to 1½ teaspoons. Substitute ¾ cup jarred caramel sauce for sugar and unsalted dry-roasted peanuts for almonds.

Slow Cooker Tuscan White Bean Stew

This rustic Italian dish can take all day to prepare, so we outsourced it to the slow cooker.

BY KATIE LEAIRD

I KNEW THAT this hearty, restorative autumn stew of creamy cannellini beans, savory pancetta, sweet garlic, and healthful kale would need time to develop its deep flavors. I didn't, however, want to stand at the stove and stir the pot for hours on end. So I turned to the slow cooker, an appliance built for long, hands-off simmering. But even when loaded up with assertively flavored pancetta, garlic, and rosemary—iconic Italian ingredients—slow cookers have a tendency to produce a washed-out result. My challenge was to keep the flavors intact and keep the stew in balance.

I decided early on to use dried, rather than canned, beans. Besides being even cheaper than the canned variety, dried beans are a better choice for the slow cooker because they are less likely to overcook—and because they're in the cooker for several hours, they don't need a presoak. Lucky for us, slow cookers expertly handle beans with a gentle heat that prevents rupturing and toughening.

But during a few tests, I noticed that the beans were cooking inconsistently—a handful or so of each batch floated to the top of the stew and remained crunchy. For an easy fix, I used a cartouche, a piece of parchment paper carefully cut to just cover the food while it simmers. This kept all the beans submerged for even cooking.

Pancetta, the Italian bacon, gives Tuscan bean soup smoky, meaty notes. But after stewing for 6 to 7 hours, the meat tasted spent. To preserve its flavor and texture, I sautéed the pancetta first to render its fat and then removed the meat and set it aside to stir into the stew just before serving. I then cooked chopped onion, celery, carrots, and smashed garlic cloves in the fat, ensuring bacony flavor evenly distributed throughout.

Rosemary is a fickle herb; its pine-like pungency can turn bitter if stewed for too long. Adding it just 30 to 45 minutes before the stew was done kept its flavor in check. I also added chopped kale and a small can of diced tomatoes at the same time; stirring them in at this late stage helped ensure vibrant color and guarded against sliminess.

Once the stew was ready (after about 8 to 9 hours on low or 6 to 7 on high), I roughly mashed a few of the beans with the back of a spoon and gave it a final stir for extra creaminess. A healthy swirl of good olive oil over the top finished it off.

SLOW-COOKER TUSCAN WHITE BEAN STEW

Serves 6 to 8

We prefer the color and texture of Lacinato kale in this stew, but you can substitute curly kale or 6 ounces of bagged, chopped kale. We top the stew with a cartouche (an oval piece of parchment paper that sits directly on the food) during cooking to trap moisture and help the beans cook evenly.

- 8 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for drizzling
- 6 ounces pancetta, cut into ¼-inch pieces
- 1 onion, chopped fine
- 2 celery ribs, cut into ½-inch pieces
- 2 carrots, peeled and cut into ½-inch pieces
- 8 garlic cloves, smashed and peeled
- 1 pound (2½ cups) dried cannellini beans, picked over and rinsed
- 4 cups chicken broth
- 4 cups water
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 teaspoons salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- 8 ounces kale, stemmed and cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1 (14.5-ounce) can diced tomatoes, drained
- 1 sprig fresh rosemary

1. Trace lid of slow cooker on parchment paper and cut just inside of outline; set aside. Heat oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat until shimmering. Add pancetta and cook until crispy, 6 to 8 minutes. Using slotted spoon, transfer pancetta to small bowl and let cool completely; cover and refrigerate until needed.

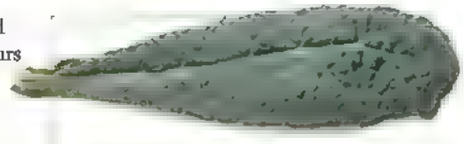
2. Add onion, celery, and carrots to fat in skillet and cook, stirring occasionally, until vegetables are lightly browned, about 10 minutes. Stir in garlic and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute. Transfer vegetable mixture to slow cooker.

3. Add beans, broth, water, bay leaves, salt, and pepper to slow cooker; stir to combine. Gently press parchment cutout onto surface of stew. Cover and cook until beans are tender, 6 to 7 hours on high or 8 to 9 hours on low.

4. Discard parchment. Stir in kale, tomatoes, and rosemary sprig. Cover and cook until kale is fully tender, 30 to 45 minutes on high.

5. Discard bay leaves and rosemary sprig. Use back of spoon to mash some beans against side of slow cooker to thicken stew, if desired. Stir in pancetta. Serve, drizzled with extra oil.

Canned beans turn to mush after hours in a slow cooker, so for this recipe we start with dried beans. The gentle, steady heat of the slow cooker renders the beans tender, not tough.



INGREDIENT SPOTLIGHT

Lacinato Kale

For this recipe, we prefer the robust, rich flavor and tender texture of Lacinato kale (also called black, dinosaur, cavolo nero, or Tuscan).

TEST KITCHEN TECHNIQUE

Making a Cartouche

A cartouche (a rounded piece of parchment paper) has a fancy name, but it's very simple to make. Simply trace the lid of the slow cooker on the parchment paper and cut just inside the outline. Gently press the cartouche onto the surface of the stew to keep the beans submerged during cooking.

Equipment Review Nonstick Skillets

We demanded our contenders clear a slew of sticky hurdles.

BY HANNAH CROWLEY

KEY Good ★★★ Fair ★★ Poor ★

THE TEST KITCHEN GAUNTLET

7 skillets, 9 tests

There are numerous factors to consider when testing cookware. These are the tests we subjected each skillet to.

1. Fry consecutive eggs with no fat until they stick—up to 50 eggs
2. Brown layer of flour to observe heating patterns and evenness
3. Cook pork and broccoli stir-fry
4. Pan-fry sole fillets
5. Cook, slice, and serve frittata using metal utensils
6. Wash by hand 10 times; wash in dishwasher five times
7. Bang on concrete ledge
8. Heat and then shock in cold water
9. Fry consecutive eggs with no fat until they stick—up to 50 eggs—a second time to evaluate durability

WINNING TRAITS

Shape and Color Matter

What makes one skillet better than another? Here are three common characteristics of our top-rated pans.

darker surface to encourage browning
at least 9.5 inches of flat, usable cooking surface
flared sides for better access to food

Visit **CooksCountry.com/oct16** to view the entire results chart and get tips on keeping your nonstick skillet in tip-top shape for the long haul

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

OXO GOOD GRIPS Non-Stick 12-Inch Open Frypan
Model: CW000957-003
Price: $39.99
Layers of Nonstick Coating: 3
Ovensafe to: 390°F
Weight: 2.35 lb
Diameter: 12.25 in
Usable Surface Area: 9.75 in

Nonstick Ability ★★★
Food Quality ★★★
Maneuverability ★★★
Capacity ★★★
Durability ★★½

This pan came slick and stayed that way—we stopped both fried egg tests after 50 eggs. It cooked and released food perfectly, thanks to its darker finish and excellent nonstick coating. Its gently flared sides and lightweight design made it easy to load, unload, and move. Its grippy stay-cool handle was flawless and its cooking surface vast. It showed some light knife marks but otherwise emerged from testing unscathed.

RECOMMENDED

T-FAL Professional Non-Stick Fry Pan
Model: E9380884
Price: $32.02
Layers of Nonstick Coating: 5
Ovensafe to: 400°F
Weight: 2.5 lb
Diameter: 12.4 in
Usable Surface Area: 9.5 in

Nonstick Ability ★★★
Food Quality ★★½
Maneuverability ★★★
Capacity ★★★
Durability ★★

Thanks to five layers of nonstick coating, our old winner emerged from our slicing tests virtually unmarked. It cooked and released food well, was light and comfortable, and had flared sides for easy access. Unfortunately, its surface domed slightly, so oil and egg yolks pooled around the edges. It also dented during abuse testing.

NOT RECOMMENDED

ZWILLING Madura Plus 11" Nonstick Fry Pan
Model: 66299-286
Price: $59.99

This pan was just too small—fish fillets rode up its sides. Its handle was jarred loose during testing.

FARBERWARE High Performance Stainless Steel 12-Inch Nonstick Skillet
Model: 77227 **Price:** $32.99

This product offered only two layers of coating, and its raised surface wasn't nonstick.

CUISINART Chef's Classic Non-Stick Stainless 12" Skillet
Model: 722-30HNS
Price: $52.95

A small disk bottom led to overcooking around the perimeter of this skillet, and it just wasn't very nonstick.

CIRCULON Symmetry 11-Inch Open Skillet
Model: 82894 **Price:** $37.31

This small pan's imprinted bull's-eye pattern wasn't very nonstick. Its handle was uncomfortable.

BIALETTI Triply 12" Saute Pan
Model: 7472 **Price:** $59.99

This heavy pan released only five eggs before mangling its sixth, and at the end of testing zero. Plus, its pale surface resulted in pale frittatas.

NONSTICK SKILLETS ARE big business. According to Hugh Rushing of the Cookware Manufacturers Association, 70 percent of all skillets sold in this country are nonstick. In the test kitchen, we reach for our nonstick skillets when we're cooking delicate foods that stick, like eggs or fish. We also like these pans for stir-fries because the brown bits (or fond) don't stick to the pans as much, so there's less chance of their burning.

Our ideal nonstick skillet is easy to handle, is durable, has great release, and cooks food evenly with appropriate browning. We evaluated the market and chose the top seven pans from major manufacturers, including our past winner from T-fal. We prefer 12-inch skillets, but we included two 11-inch models because they were the largest skillets offered by two major manufacturers. We set a $60 price limit because nonstick pans wear faster than other pans, so we don't think they're worth a major investment.

We started by cracking eggs into each preheated pan—with no fat added—to assess their nonstick ability. We kept cooking consecutive over-easy eggs in each pan until they started to stick, we repeated this test at the end of testing (after cooking fish fillets, stir-fries, and frittatas in each pan) to gauge how the nonstick coatings held up over time. Along the way, we intentionally broke every rule we could think of for nonstick pans. We cut food in the skillets with knives, used metal spatulas and abrasive sponges, stacked the skillets, repeatedly shocked them in cold water, and washed them in a dish washer. We also took them outside and banged them on a sharp concrete ledge to simulate years of rough handling.

What did we learn? First of all, size, shape, and design matter. The two smaller pans were a bust. While we looked at each pan's rim-to-rim diameter (the metric used by manufacturers and retailers) initially, it was the diameter of their flat bottoms—their cooking area—that proved more important; we needed at least 9.5 inches of flat surface or fish fillets rode up the sides and cooked unevenly and anything we sautéed was crowded and browned poorly.

Heavy pans were taxing to move and maneuver, as were pans with sharp handles or handles that got hot. We preferred lightweight pans with rounded, grippy handles that stayed cool. We also preferred lower, flared sides to taller or straighter ones; their more open design made it easier to maneuver the food in and out of the pan.

As for the nonstick coatings, most cookware manufacturers purchase them from large chemical companies. They choose from a range of options, from cheap to premium. The composition of the coating, how well it's applied, and

EQUIPMENT UPDATE

Chemical Concerns

There has been a recent big change in nonstick cookware. Due to health concerns, the Environmental Protection Agency asked chemical companies to remove perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), one of the concerning chemicals used by manufacturers, from processing by 2015. Every manufacturer we researched has complied, and all of the nonstick skillets in our lineup are now PFOA-free.

Illustration: Jay Layman

TEST KITCHEN DISCOVERY

You Can Season Nonstick

We found that much like cast-iron and carbon-steel pans, a nonstick skillet's nonstick ability can be improved with seasoning. Simply warm the empty pan over low heat for 30 seconds, remove it from the heat, and rub it with a tablespoon of vegetable oil. Wipe the skillet dry with a paper towel and it's ready to go. We suggest seasoning your nonstick skillet this way when it's new and whenever you notice it becoming sticky.

how many layers are applied all affect performance and durability.

Two pans we tested had raised patterns, ostensibly for durability and better heat transfer, but they weren't very nonstick and mangled eggs. Only two pans (both with smooth surfaces) aced all of our nonstick tests, culminating with flawlessly releasing 50 eggs in a row after weeks of testing. By contrast, one low-ranked pan failed to flip a single egg at the end of testing.

The skillets in our lineup had from two to five layers of nonstick coating; the top performers had at least three. The pan with five layers was our past winner from T-fal; the extra layers offered superior durability in the coating, but this skillet had other construction issues. It dented readily when we struck it on the concrete ledge and domed slightly in the center of its cooking surface when it was heated. This meant that oil ran to the pan edges, so the fish fillets browned irregularly and the eggs were misshapen—they sprouted legs where the whites had leaked toward the edges. We still think it's a good pan, but it's no longer best in show.

Of the seven pans we tested, we can recommend only two. Our top pan, from Oxo Good Grips, had a broad, smooth, flat surface that cooked and released food perfectly. It had a darker finish for better browning and was light and maneuverable, with an excellent grippy, stay-cool handle. Its flared sides allowed us to easily move food in and out of the pan. It's a little more expensive than our past winner, but it was the only skillet that earned our "highly recommended" rating.

Taste Test Apple Cider Vinegar

Mellow, punchy, sweet, subtle: Could we find a cider vinegar that has it all?

BY LAUREN SAVOIE

JUST AS ITALY is known for balsamic vinegar and Spain for sherry vinegar, America has a vinegar to lay claim to: apple cider vinegar. Cider vinegar is a natural byproduct of apple cider—left to sit long enough, the sugar in the apples will convert to alcohol and then to acetic acid. Cider vinegar has been around since at least 2500 BC, and it has been produced in the United States since the colonial days. Before the advent of refrigeration, most American homes kept cider vinegar on hand for preserving, cooking, and cleaning.

These days, we use apple cider vinegar for a comparatively mellow, slightly sweet kick of acidity in glazes, slaws, and sauces. We're particularly keen on using it in fall dishes, where the apple notes complement other seasonal ingredients. Since we last tasted apple cider vinegar, our former winning product by French manufacturer Maille has become hard to find in the United States. We wanted to see if there was a better, more widely available option.

We rounded up six American-made cider vinegars and asked 21 America's Test Kitchen staffers to sample the products plain, cooked into a pan sauce, stirred into coleslaw, and mixed into a barbecue sauce. Every vinegar we tried worked fine. That said, tasters zeroed in on some characteristics that separate vinegar that's "fine" from vinegar that's really good.

Cider will convert naturally to vinegar with time, but manufacturers typically speed up the process by adding a "mother," which is bacteria from an established vinegar. Once all the alcohol is converted to acid (there's no measurable alcohol in vinegar), the vinegar is either filtered to remove the cloudy sediment of leftover mother or bottled unfiltered. In the plain tasting, testers could visually identify the unfiltered vinegars by their darker, hazier appearance and small floating particles. While tasters didn't notice any difference in consistency when tasting filtered and unfiltered products, many thought the unfiltered vinegars were slightly more complex—fruity, floral, and appley—when sampled straight.

These nuances were still prominent when we tasted the vinegars in a subtle pan sauce, where tasters preferred the fruitiness and slightly funky liveliness of unfiltered products. But the lines between filtered and unfiltered started to blur when we tried the vinegars in barbecue sauce and slaw, punchy foods with lots of competing flavors. In these applications, tasters wanted a bright, bold kick of tartness and preferred products they perceived as more acidic—regardless of whether they were filtered or unfiltered.

But more acidity wasn't always a good thing. One product was slightly too tangy and overwhelmed the mellow pan sauce with its harsher tartness. To get a better read on acidity, we sent the vinegars to an independent lab for analysis. There was no clear correlation between acidity and whether the vinegars were filtered or not. All the products contained between 5.0 percent and 5.3 percent acid, with tasters giving the edge to products that fell in the middle, at around 5.1 percent acid. Though this may seem like a relatively small range, our science editor confirmed that it's actually pretty significant when measuring acidity. Products with any less acid lacked brightness in more flavorful recipes, while vinegars that were more acidic overpowered delicate dishes. Products that met in the middle worked well in every recipe we tried, lending a lively bite to edgier dishes without washing out the mellower ones.

The one exception was our runner-up, which, at 5.3 percent acid, was the most acidic product in the lineup. Lab tests showed, however, that this was the only vinegar we tasted that was also measurably sweet, at 1.4 percent sugar compared with 0 percent in every other product. Manufacturers don't add sugar to vinegar; instead, this product's manufacturer likely started with a sweeter cider and stopped fermentation before all the sugars were converted to acid. Tasters thought the extra sugar in this vinegar helped amplify its apple flavor and temper its higher acidity.

Our favorite was a well-rounded, versatile vinegar that worked well in every recipe. Fortunately, it's also the one you're most likely to encounter at the supermarket. Heinz Filtered Apple Cider Vinegar enlivened pan sauce, tempered sweet slaw, and balanced barbecue sauce with its bright, moderate acidity and clear apple notes. At $0.17 an ounce, it's also one of the cheapest cider products we found, proving that you don't have to shell out extra for great apple cider vinegar.

RECOMMENDED

HEINZ Filtered Apple Cider Vinegar
Price: $2.79 for 16 fl oz ($0.17 per fl oz)
Style: Filtered **Acidity:** 5.1% **Sugar:** 0%

FLAVOR FAVE

With just the right amount of acidity, this familiar supermarket vinegar was "sharp" and "punchy" with a subtle "floral" fruitiness. "I'd let this enliven my barbecue any day," said one taster.

WHITE HOUSE Apple Cider Vinegar
Price: $1.59 for 16 fl oz ($0.10 per fl oz)
Style: Filtered **Acidity:** 5.3% **Sugar:** 1.4%

With a "bright" punch of acidity and just a hint of sugar, this filtered vinegar had a "juicy," "almost drinkable" sweetness and "vibrant" notes of "green apple." It was also the cheapest vinegar in the bunch.

BRAGG Organic Apple Cider Vinegar
Price: $3.99 for 16 fl oz ($0.25 per fl oz)
Style: Unfiltered **Acidity:** 5.1% **Sugar:** 0%

This unfiltered vinegar emerged at the top of the pack in pan sauce, where its "boozy," "zesty" apple flavor lent a complex "zing." While these "slightly funky" notes were lost in slaw and barbecue sauce, most tasters appreciated this product's "lively" acidity and "sweet apple finish."

SPECTRUM NATURALS Organic Unpasteurized Apple Cider Vinegar Filtered
Price: $3.99 for 16 fl oz ($0.25 per fl oz)
Style: Filtered **Acidity:** 5.0% **Sugar:** 0%

This "very pale" vinegar had a "mellow" flavor. Though tasters thought this product was "clean" and "bright," some lamented that it "lacked complexity." Still, it worked decently in every recipe we tried.

SPECTRUM NATURALS Organic Unpasteurized Apple Cider Vinegar Unfiltered
Price: $3.49 for 16 fl oz ($0.22 per fl oz)
Style: Unfiltered **Acidity:** 5.0% **Sugar:** 0%

When sampled plain and in pan sauce, this unfiltered vinegar had delicate hints of "melon" and "sweet apple." These nuances were much subtler in punchy recipes like slaw and barbecue sauce. This vinegar won't ruin your recipes, but there are better choices.

EDEN Organic Apple Cider Vinegar
Price: $3.59 for 16 fl oz ($0.22 per fl oz)
Style: Unfiltered **Acidity:** 5.2% **Sugar:** 0%

This unfiltered vinegar had plenty of acidity but no sweetness to balance it out. While its "bold" tartness was deemed "bright" in barbecue sauce, tasters found it a tiny bit "harsh" in pan sauce. Tasters were also mixed about its "boozy," "fermented" notes.

Heirloom Recipe

We're looking for recipes that you treasure—the ones that have been handed down in your family for a generation or more, that always come out for the holidays, and that have earned a place at your table and in your heart through many years of meals. Send us the recipes that spell home to you. Visit **CooksCountry.com/recipe_submission** (or write to Heirloom Recipes, *Cook's Country*, P.O. Box 470739, Brookline, MA 02447) and tell us a little about the recipe. Include your name and mailing address. **If we print your recipe, you'll receive a free one-year subscription to *Cook's Country*.**

OLD-FASHIONED COCONUT-PECAN SQUARES

"When I was in college, my mother would send a box of these to me every semester, just before exams." –Trina Drysdale, Eugene, Ore.

Makes 24 bars

Use a fine-mesh strainer to evenly distribute the confectioners' sugar.

- **12 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened**
- **2½ cups packed (17½ ounces) light brown sugar**
- **1½ cups (7½ ounces) all-purpose flour**
- **Salt**
- **5 large eggs (3 separated, 2 whole)**
- **1 tablespoon vanilla extract**
- **1 cup pecans, toasted and chopped fine**
- **1 cup (3 ounces) sweetened shredded coconut, toasted and chopped fine**
- **1 tablespoon confectioners' sugar**

1. Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Grease 13 by 9 inch baking pan. Using stand mixer fitted with paddle, beat butter and ½ cup brown sugar on medium speed until smooth, about 1 minute. Add flour and ½ teaspoon salt and continue to beat until dough begins to form, about 2 minutes longer. Press dough evenly into bottom of prepared pan. Bake until light golden brown, 12 to 15 minutes. Transfer pan to wire rack and let cool for 15 minutes.

2. Using clean, dry mixer bowl fitted with whisk, whip 3 egg whites on medium-low speed until foamy, about 1 minute. Increase speed to medium-high and whip until stiff peaks form, 1 to 2 minutes. Transfer whites to separate bowl, set aside.

3. Return now-empty bowl to mixer still fitted with whisk and whip vanilla, remaining 2 cups brown sugar, 2 whole eggs, remaining 3 egg yolks, and ½ teaspoon salt on medium-high speed until thick, about 2 minutes, scraping down bowl as needed. Fold in pecans, coconut, and reserved whipped egg whites by hand until fully incorporated.

4. Spread mixture evenly over cooled crust. Bake until top is deep golden brown, 24 to 26 minutes. Transfer pan to wire rack and let cool completely. Run paring knife around edges of pan to release bars. Cut into 2-inch squares and dust with confectioners' sugar. Serve.

COMING NEXT ISSUE

Our festive December/January issue features holiday favorites from **Boneless Rib Roast with Yorkshire Pudding** to **Soft and Chewy Gingerbread Cookies** and **Classic Eggnog**. Then we visit Pittsburgh for **Transylvanian Goulash** and **Haluski**, drop by the Connecticut coast for **Lighthouse Inn Potatoes**, and hop over to Hawaii for a slice of **Chocolate Haupia Pie**. Come along for the ride!

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RC = Recipe Card

FIND THE ROOSTER!

A tiny version of this rooster has been hidden in the pages of this issue. Write to us with its location and we'll enter you in a random drawing. The first correct entry drawn will win our winning nonstick 12-inch skillet, and each of the next five will receive a free one-year subscription to *Cook's Country*. To enter, visit **CooksCountry.com/rooster** by November 30, 2016, or write to Rooster ON16, *Cook's Country*, P.O. Box 470739, Brookline, MA 02447. Include your name and address. Stephanie Sharp of Omaha, Nebraska, found the rooster in the June/July 2016 issue on page 14 and won our favorite kitchen timer.

WEB EXTRAS

More recipes and expanded reviews are available for free for 4 months at **CooksCountry.com**

Arroz con Pollo
Buttermilk-Ranch Pita Chips
Classic Yellow Bundt Cake
Grilled Butterflied Lemon Chicken
Herb Roast Chicken
Lightly Sweetened Whipped Cream
Montreal Seasoned Salt Blend
Romaine Salad with Green Goddess Dressing
Slow-Cooker Ratatouille
Smoked Roast Beef
Testing Nonstick Skillets
Testing Potato Mashers

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30 MINUTE SUPPER

CARAWAY PORK WITH SAUERKRAUT AND APPLES

30 MINUTE SUPPER

TOMATILLO CHICKEN TOSTADAS

30 MINUTE SUPPER

PAN-SEARED HADDOCK WITH BROCCOLI AND OREGANO VINAIGRETTE

30 MINUTE SUPPER

PASTA WITH CHICKEN SAUSAGE, SWISS CHARD, AND WHITE BEANS

TOMATILLO CHICKEN TOSTADAS Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: By using jarred tomatillo (green) salsa, you can put this satisfying supper together in minutes.

- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1 (2½-pound) rotisserie chicken, skin and bones discarded, meat shredded into bite-size pieces (3 cups)
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 cups tomatillo salsa
- 1 (16-ounce) can refried beans
- 8 (5-inch) corn tostadas, warmed
- 2 cups shredded iceberg lettuce
- 2 tomatoes, cored and chopped
- ½ cup sour cream
- ¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro

1. Heat oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add chicken and onion and cook until onion is softened, about 5 minutes. Add salsa and cook until thickened, about 5 minutes. Cover and keep warm.

2. Place beans in bowl and microwave until hot, about 3 minutes, stirring halfway through microwaving. Divide beans among tostadas. Top each tostada with chicken mixture, lettuce, tomatoes, sour cream, and cilantro. Serve.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: Our favorite jarred tomatillo salsa is made by Frontera.

CARAWAY PORK WITH SAUERKRAUT AND APPLES Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Searing the caraway-coated pork toasts the seeds and brings out their full flavor and aroma.

- 2 (12- to 16-ounce) pork tenderloins, trimmed
- 1 tablespoon caraway seeds
- Salt and pepper
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 2 apples, cored, halved, and cut into ¼-inch-thick slices
- 1 onion, chopped fine
- 1 pound sauerkraut, rinsed and drained
- 2 tablespoons packed light brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh dill

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 475 degrees. Pat pork dry with paper towels and sprinkle with caraway seeds, 1 teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper, pressing lightly to adhere. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Cook pork until browned on all sides, 5 to 7 minutes; transfer to plate.

2. Add remaining 1 tablespoon oil, apples, onion, ⅛ teaspoon salt, and ⅛ teaspoon pepper to now-empty skillet and cook over medium heat until softened, about 5 minutes, scraping up any browned bits. Stir in sauerkraut and sugar. Place pork on top of sauerkraut mixture. Bake until pork registers 140 degrees, about 13 minutes.

3. Transfer pork to cutting board, tent with foil, and let rest for 5 minutes. Stir dill into sauerkraut mixture and serve with pork.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: There's no need to peel the apples for this dish; we prefer red-skinned Fujis or Galas to give the dish more color, but any sweet apple will do.

PASTA WITH CHICKEN SAUSAGE, SWISS CHARD, AND WHITE BEANS Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: The bean liquid thickens the sauce.

- 8 ounces spaghetti
- Salt and pepper
- 12 ounces Swiss chard, stems chopped fine, leaves sliced into ½-inch-wide strips
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for drizzling
- 12 ounces cooked chicken sausage, halved lengthwise and sliced ½ inch thick
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 (15-ounce) can cannellini beans
- ½ cup chicken broth
- 2 ounces Pecorino Romano cheese, grated (1 cup)
- 1½ tablespoons lemon juice

1. Bring 4 quarts water to boil in large pot. Add pasta and 1 tablespoon salt and cook, stirring often, until just al dente. Add chard and cook until tender, about 1 minute. Drain pasta and chard and return to pot.

2. Meanwhile, heat oil in 12-inch skillet over medium heat until shimmering. Add sausage and cook, stirring occasionally, until well browned, about 8 minutes. Add garlic, ¼ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add beans and their liquid and broth and bring to boil, scraping up any browned bits.

3. Add ½ cup Pecorino, lemon juice, and sausage-bean mixture to pasta and toss to combine. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve, drizzled with extra oil and passing remaining ½ cup Pecorino separately.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: Our favorite canned cannellini beans are from Goya. For a spicy kick, add a pinch of red pepper flakes with the Pecorino.

PAN-SEARED HADDOCK WITH BROCCOLI AND OREGANO VINAIGRETTE Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Mayonnaise adheres the bread crumbs to the haddock without a messy breading process.

- 1 pound broccoli florets, cut into 2-inch pieces
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- Salt and pepper
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh oregano
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice, plus lemon wedges for serving
- 1 small garlic clove, minced
- ½ cup panko bread crumbs
- 4 (6- to 8-ounce) skinless haddock fillets, 1 inch thick
- 4 teaspoons mayonnaise

1. Adjust oven rack to lowest position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Toss broccoli with 2 tablespoons oil, ¼ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper on rimmed baking sheet. Roast until browned and tender, 14 to 16 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, combine oregano, parsley, lemon juice, garlic, ¼ cup oil, ¼ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper in bowl; set aside. Place panko in shallow dish. Pat haddock dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper. Spread 1 teaspoon mayonnaise on 1 side of each fillet. Press mayonnaise-coated sides of fillets into panko.

3. Heat remaining 2 tablespoons oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat until shimmering. Place fillets panko side down in skillet and cook until browned, about 7 minutes. Flip fillets and cook until fish registers 140 degrees, about 2 minutes. Serve with broccoli, vinaigrette, and lemon wedges.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: The vinaigrette will separate after 5 to 10 minutes; rewhisk before serving. If you can't find haddock, you can use cod here.

30-MINUTE SUPPER

PECAN-STUFFED PORK CHOPS WITH MASHED SWEET POTATOES

30-MINUTE SUPPER

MEATBALL SUBS

30-MINUTE SUPPER

CREAMY GNOCCHI WITH MUSHROOMS

30-MINUTE SUPPER

STEAK WITH DIJON GREEN BEAN–POTATO SALAD

MEATBALL SUBS Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: From making the meatballs to heating the sauce and melting the cheese, this entire recipe happens in the oven, avoiding stovetop splatter.

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1¼ pounds 85 percent lean ground beef
- ¾ cup dried bread crumbs with Italian seasonings
- 2 large eggs, lightly beaten
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- 4 (6-inch) Italian sub rolls, split lengthwise
- 1⅓ cups jarred marinara sauce
- 4 thin slices deli provolone cheese (4 ounces)

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 400 degrees. Grease rimmed baking sheet with oil. Mix beef, bread crumbs, eggs, garlic powder, salt, and pepper in bowl until well combined. Form mixture into twelve 2-inch meatballs, place on prepared sheet, and bake until browned and meat registers 160 degrees, about 15 minutes. Transfer meatballs to plate; discard accumulated grease on sheet.

2. Carefully line now-empty sheet with parchment paper. Place rolls on sheet and lay 3 meatballs inside each roll. Top meatballs on each sandwich with ⅓ cup marinara sauce and 1 slice provolone. Bake until cheese is melted and sauce is heated through, about 5 minutes. Serve.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: Our favorite premium jarred sauce is Victoria Marinara Sauce.

PECAN-STUFFED PORK CHOPS WITH MASHED SWEET POTATOES Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Garlicky Boursin is a good stuffing base.

- 4 (6- to 8-ounce) boneless pork chops, ¾ to 1 inch thick, trimmed
- ½ (5.2-ounce) package Boursin Garlic & Fine Herbs cheese
- ¼ cup pecans, toasted and chopped fine
- Salt and pepper
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 2 pounds sweet potatoes, peeled and cut into ½-inch pieces
- 1½ cups water
- ¼ cup heavy cream
- ⅛ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh chives

1. Using paring knife, cut 2-inch opening in side of each chop and create pocket. Mash Boursin and pecans together in bowl. Stuff pockets evenly with cheese mixture, then seal pockets with toothpicks. Pat chops dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper.

2. Melt 1 tablespoon butter in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat. Add chops and cook until well browned on first side, about 6 minutes. Flip chops, cover, and cook until meat registers 140 degrees, about 6 minutes. Transfer chops to plate, discard toothpicks, and tent with aluminum foil.

3. Combine potatoes, water, remaining 2 tablespoons butter, 1 teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper in now-empty skillet. Cover and bring to simmer over medium-high heat. Cook until potatoes are tender, about 10 minutes. Uncover and continue to cook until almost dry, about 2 minutes longer. Off heat, stir in cream and cayenne; mash with potato masher until smooth. Serve potatoes with chops, sprinkled with chives.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: You will need four sturdy, plain toothpicks.

STEAK WITH DIJON GREEN BEAN–POTATO SALAD Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: To ensure that the potatoes and green beans effectively absorb the vinaigrette, we dress them while they are still hot.

- 1½ pounds small red potatoes, unpeeled, halved
- Salt and pepper
- 8 ounces green beans, trimmed and cut into 1½-inch lengths
- 6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- ¼ cup chopped fresh parsley
- 2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
- 2 tablespoons white wine vinegar
- 1 small shallot, minced
- 2 (1-pound) boneless strip or rib-eye steaks, about 1 inch thick, trimmed and halved crosswise

1. Bring 2 quarts water to boil in large saucepan over medium-high heat. Add potatoes and 1½ tablespoons salt; return to boil and cook for 10 minutes. Add green beans and cook until both vegetables are tender, about 5 minutes. Drain.

2. Whisk 5 tablespoons oil, parsley, mustard, vinegar, shallot, and ½ teaspoon pepper together in large bowl. Add hot vegetables to bowl with dressing and toss gently to combine. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

3. Pat steaks dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper. Heat remaining 1 tablespoon oil in 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Cook steaks until well browned and meat registers 125 degrees (for medium-rare), 3 to 5 minutes per side. Serve steaks with salad.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: Use small red potatoes measuring 1 to 2 inches in diameter.

CREAMY GNOCCHI WITH MUSHROOMS Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Combining vegetable broth with Parmesan and just a touch of cream makes a velvety sauce that doesn't weigh down the gnocchi.

- 1¼ cups vegetable broth
- 2 ounces Parmesan cheese, grated (1 cup)
- ¼ cup heavy cream
- ⅛ teaspoon ground nutmeg
- Salt and pepper
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 pound vacuum-packed gnocchi
- 1 pound cremini mushrooms, trimmed and quartered
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- ¼ cup fresh basil leaves, torn

1. Whisk broth, Parmesan, cream, nutmeg, and ½ teaspoon pepper together in bowl; set aside. Melt 2 tablespoons butter in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add gnocchi and cook until lightly browned, about 5 minutes; transfer to plate.

2. Melt remaining 1 tablespoon butter in now-empty skillet over medium-high heat. Add mushrooms and ¼ teaspoon salt and cook until golden brown, about 10 minutes. Stir in garlic and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add broth mixture and gnocchi and bring to simmer. Cook, stirring occasionally, until sauce has thickened, 5 to 7 minutes. Sprinkle with basil and serve.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: The partially cooked, vacuum-packed gnocchi found in the pasta aisle work best here, but refrigerated or frozen gnocchi can also be used.

Cranberry-Pear Stack Cake

Ripe pears and tart cranberries make a fine filling for buttery cake layers.

TO MAKE THIS CAKE, YOU WILL NEED:

- **10 ounces (2½ cups) fresh or frozen cranberries**
- **½ cup (3½ ounces) sugar**
- **¼ cup water**
- **2 pounds Bartlett or Bosc pears, peeled, halved, cored, and cut into 1-inch pieces**
- **2 teaspoons grated orange zest**
- **1 teaspoon ground cinnamon**
- **⅛ teaspoon salt**
- **1 recipe Classic Yellow Bundt Cake batter***
- **1½ cups Lightly Sweetened Whipped Cream***

FOR THE FILLING: Combine cranberries, sugar, and water in large saucepan and cook over medium heat until cranberries are just starting to burst, about 5 minutes, stirring frequently. Remove 2 tablespoons cranberries and set aside in refrigerator. Add pears, orange zest, cinnamon, and salt to remaining cranberries in saucepan and cook over medium heat until pears are very soft and almost all liquid has evaporated, about 45 minutes, stirring frequently and reducing heat as needed if bottom begins to scorch. Transfer fruit mixture to food processor and process until smooth, 30 to 45 seconds (you should have 2½ cups puree). Transfer to bowl, press parchment paper on top, and refrigerate until completely cool, about 4 hours.

FOR THE CAKE: Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Spray two 8-inch round cake pans with baking spray with flour and line with parchment. Pour 8 ounces (about 1 cup) batter into each pan and spread into even layer. Bake until tops are set and edges are just starting to brown, 12 to 14 minutes. Let cakes cool in pans for 10 minutes, then remove cakes from pans and let cool completely on wire rack (leaving parchment on cakes). Wipe pans clean and repeat process twice more, for a total of 6 cake layers.

TO ASSEMBLE: Gently remove parchment and place 1 cake round on cake plate or pedestal. Spread ½ cup puree in even layer over cake. Repeat with remaining cake layers and remaining puree, leaving top of cake plain. Spread whipped cream in even layer over top of cake. Garnish center with reserved cranberries. Serve.

*Go to **CooksCountry.com** for our recipes for Classic Yellow Bundt Cake and Lightly Sweetened Whipped Cream or use your own. Be advised that if you use your own Bundt cake recipe, you will need at least 6 cups of batter.

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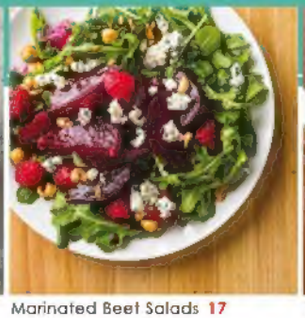
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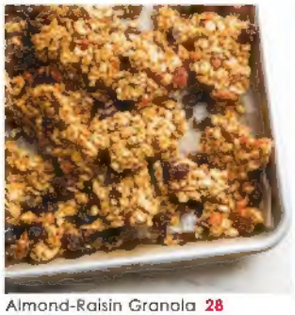
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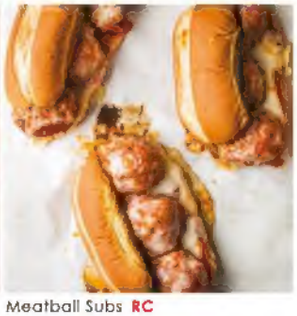
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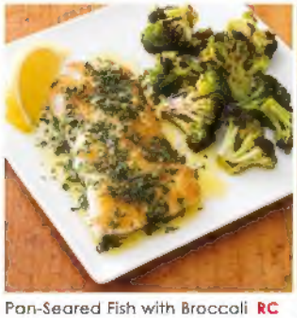
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